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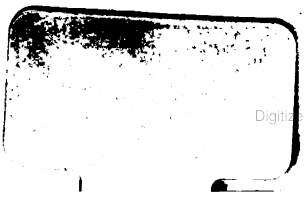

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CAPTAIN SHANNON

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CAPTAIN SHANNON

BY

COULSON KERNAHAN

AUTHOR OF "A DEAD MAN'S DIARY," "A BOOK OF STRANGE SINS," "SORROW AND SONG," "GOD AND THE ANT," ETC.

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1896

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	Who is "Captain Shannon"? . .	1
II	Captain Shannon's Manifesto . .	9
III	The "Daily Record" to the Rescue	20
IV	The Murder in Fleet Street . .	25
V	The Identity of Captain Shannon disclosed at last	34
VI	I make up my Mind to find Captain Shannon	44
VII	My First Meeting with James Mullen	52
VIII	The Dynamite Hulk	66
IX	I take up my Quarters at Canvey	74
X	I board the "Cuban Queen" . .	81
XI	Personal Explanations	94
XII	How Captain Shannon's Autograph came into my Possession . . .	101
XIII	I possess Myself of the Secret of James Bakewell Green. . .	113
XIV	One of the Documents which cost my Inquiry Agent his Life . .	120
XV	A Document of Importance . . .	127

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
XVI	Henry Jeanes, alias James Mullen	136
XVII	On the Heels of James Mullen .	142
XVIII	I become a Hairdresser's Assistant	160
XIX	"Are there any Letters for Henry Jeanes, please?"	166
XX	How James Mullen and Myself almost met	171
XXI	How I struck James Mullen's Track	180
XXII	The Artfulness of James Mullen	193
XXIII	How I got wedged in a Window, and left behind	200
XXIV	A Pretty Kettle of Fish! . . .	213
XXV	James Mullen and I meet at last	219
XXVI	After the Explosion.	226
XXVII	I play a Game of "Bluff" with Hughes	241
XXVIII	I board the "Cuban Queen" for the Second Time	254
XXIX	I try a Fall with James Mullen.	259
XXX	More Devilry	274
XXXI	The Arrest of Captain Shannon .	281

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Captain Shannon

CHAPTER I

WHO IS "CAPTAIN SHANNON"?

THE year 18— will be memorable for the perpetration in England and in Ireland of a series of infamously diabolical outrages. On the scene of each crime was found — sometimes scrawled in plain rough capitals upon a piece of paper which was pinned to the body of a victim, sometimes rudely chalked in the same lettering upon a door or wall — this inscription — "By order. — Captain Shannon."

Who Captain Shannon was the police failed entirely to discover, although the counties in which the crimes occurred were scoured from end to end, and every person who was known to have been in the neighbourhood was subjected to the severest examination. That some who were so examined knew more than they would tell, there was reason to believe; but so dreaded

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was the miscreant's name, and so swift and terrible had been the fate of those who in the past had incurred his vengeance, that neither offers of reward nor threats of punishment could elicit anything but dogged denials.

But when the conspirators carried the war into the enemy's country, and successfully accomplished the peculiarly daring crime which wrecked the police headquarters at New Scotland Yard, the indignation of the public knew no bounds. If the emissaries of Captain Shannon could succeed in conveying an infernal machine into New Scotland Yard itself, the whole community was — so it was argued — at the mercy of a band of murderers.

The scene in the House of Commons on the night following the outrage was one of great excitement. The Chief Secretary for Ireland declared, in a memorable speech, that the purpose of the crime was to terrorise and to intimidate. No loyal English or Irish citizen would, he was sure, be deterred from doing his duty by such infamous acts ; but that they had to deal with murderers of the most determined type could not be doubted. The whole conspiracy was, in his opinion, the work of some half dozen

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assassins, who were probably the tools of the monster calling himself "Captain Shannon," in whose too fertile brain the crimes had, he believed, originated, and under whose devilishly planned directions they had been carried out.

The police had reason to suppose that the headquarters of the conspirators were in Ireland, in which country the majority of the crimes — at all events of the earlier crimes — had been committed.

He regretted to say, but it was his duty to say, that but for the disloyal attitude of a section of the Irish people — who, from dastardly and contemptible cowardice, or from sympathy with the assassins, had not only withheld the evidence, without which it was impossible to trace the various outrages to their cause, but had on more than one occasion actually sought to hinder the police in the execution of their duty — the conspirators would long since have been brought to book.

The Secretary then went on to denounce in the strongest language what he called the infamous conduct of the disloyal Irish. He declared, amid ringing cheers, that the man or woman who sought to shield such a monster as

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Captain Shannon, or to protect him and his confederates from justice, was nothing less than a murderer in the eyes of God and of man. He informed the House that although the Government had actually framed several important measures which would go far to remove the grievances of which Irishmen were complaining, he for one would, in view of what had taken place, strenuously oppose the consideration at that moment of any measures which had even the appearance of a concession to Irish demands. It was repression, not concession, which must be meted out to traitors and murderers.

Within a month after the delivery of this speech all England was horrified by the news of a crime more wantonly wicked than any outrage which had preceded it, a crime which resulted — as its perpetrators must have known it would result — in the wholesale murder of hundreds of inoffensive people against whom — excepting for the fact that they happened to be law-abiding citizens — the followers of Captain Shannon could have no grievance.

All that was known was that a respectably dressed young man, carrying what appeared to

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be about a dozen well-worn volumes from Mudie's, or some other circulating library, had entered an empty first-class carriage at Aldgate station. These books were held together by a strap — as is usual when sending or taking volumes for exchange to the libraries — and it had occurred to no one to ask to examine them, although the officials at all railway stations had, in view of the recent outrages, been instructed to challenge every passenger carrying a suspicious-looking parcel.

The theory which was afterwards put forward was that what appeared to be a parcel of volumes from a circulating library was in reality a case cunningly covered with the backs, bindings, and edges of books, and that this case contained an infernal machine of the most deadly description. It was supposed that the wretch in charge of it had purposely entered an empty carriage that he might the better carry out his infamous plan, and that after setting fire to the fuse he had left the train at the next station.

That this theory afforded the most likely explanation of what subsequently took place was generally agreed, although one well-known

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authority on explosives expressed himself as of opinion that no infernal machine capable of causing what had happened could be concealed in so small a compass as that suggested. But it was pointed out in reply that from arrests and discoveries which had been made in America and on the Continent, it was evident that the manufacture of infernal machines and investigations into the qualities of explosives were being scientifically and systematically carried on.

Though no connection had as yet been traced between the persons who had been arrested and the perpetrators of the recent outrages, the probabilities were that such connection existed, and it was asked whether it might not be possible that some one who was thus engaged in experimenting with explosives had discovered a new explosive, or a new combination of explosives, which was different from and more deadly than anything known to the authorities.

Into the probability or improbability of this and other theories which were put forward it would be idle here to enter. All that is known is that the train had only just entered the tunnel immediately to the west of Blackfriars station when there occurred the most awful explosion

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of the sort within the memory of man. The passengers, as well as the guard, driver, and stoker, not only of the train in which the explosion took place, but also of a train which was proceeding in the opposite direction and happened to be passing at the time, were killed to a man, and with the exception of one of Smith's bookstall boys, whose escape seemed almost miraculous, every soul in the station — ticket-collectors, porters, station-master, and the unfortunate people who were waiting on the platform — shared the same fate.

Nor was this all, for at the moment when the outrage occurred the train was passing under one of the busiest crossings in London — that where New Bridge Street, Blackfriars Bridge, Queen Victoria Street, and the Thames Embankment converge — and so terrific was the explosion that the space between these converging thoroughfares was blown away as a man's hand is blown away by the bursting of a gun.

The buildings in the immediate neighbourhood, including parts of St. Paul's station on the London, Chatham, and Dover railway, the offices over Blackfriars station, and De Keyser's Hotel on the opposite side of the way, were

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wrecked, and the long arm of Blackfriars Bridge lay idle across the river like a limb which has been rudely hacked from a body.

But it is not my intention to attempt any realistic description of the scene, or of the awful sights which were witnessed when, after the first paralysing moment of panic was over, the search for the injured, the dying, and the dead was commenced. The number of lives lost, including those who perished in Blackfriars station, in the two trains, in the street, and in the surrounding buildings, was enormous. Several columns of the papers next morning were filled with lists of the missing and the dead. One name on the list had a terrible significance. It was the name of the man to achieve whose murder the lives of so many innocent men and women had been ruthlessly sacrificed; the name of a man whose remains were never found, but whose funeral pyre was built of the broken bodies of hundreds of his fellow creatures,—the name of the Chief Secretary for Ireland.

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CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN SHANNON'S MANIFESTO

ON the day of the outrage upon the Metropolitan railway a manifesto from Captain Shannon, of which the following is a copy, was received by the Prime Minister at his official residence in Downing Street. It was written as usual in roughly printed capitals, and, as it bore the Dublin postmark of the preceding day, must have been posted *before the explosion had taken place.*

"*To the People of Great Britain and Ireland:*

"Fellow countrymen and countrywomen,—The Anarchistic, Nihilistic, Fenian, and similar movements of the past have all been failures. That fact there is no denying. I do not mean to say that there have been no results to the glorious war which has been waged upon a society which is content to stand by heedless and unconcerned while Russia's many millions of starving and suffering fellow-creatures are the slaves of a system by which the honour,

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liberty, and life of every man, woman, and child are at the mercy of a tyrant's whim and the whims of his myrmidons, — a society which looks on smiling while Ireland is groaning under the heel of English oppression, and while capitalists, who yawn as they seek to devise some new vice on which to squander the wealth which has become a burden to them, grind down and sweat the poor, setting one starving man to compete against another for a wage which can scarce find him and his in dry bread.

"A society which, calling itself Christian, and having it in its power to mend matters, can, unconcerned, endure such iniquities, is *blood guilty*, and so long as these things last, upon society shall its crimes be visited, — with society must all just men and true wage deadly war.

"What has been done hitherto has not been without results.

"But for the justice which was executed upon the arch-tyrant, Alexander of Russia; the blow which was struck at English tyranny by the destruction of Clerkenwell prison; the righteous punishment which befell those servants of tyrants and enemies of freedom, Burke and Cavendish, — but for these and other glorious deeds,

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the bitter cry of the oppressed all over the world had passed unheard and unheeded; Ireland had not wrung from reluctant England the few paltry concessions that have been made, and the dawning of the great day of freedom had been indefinitely postponed.

"But notwithstanding all that has been done, the fact remains and cannot be denied that Nihilists, Anarchists, Fenians, and those who, under different names and different leaders, are fighting for freedom throughout the world have, up to the present, failed to accomplish the results at which they aim.

"And why?

"*Because they have been scattered and separate organisations, each working independently of the other, and having no resources outside itself.* So long as this sort of thing continues nothing can be hoped for but the throwing away of precious lives and sorely needed money to no purpose.

"*But let these scattered forces combine into one organised and all-powerful Federation, and mankind will be at its mercy.*

"This is what has been done.

"The World Federation of Freedom is now an accomplished fact, for *all the secret societies*

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of the world have combined into one common and supreme organisation, with one common enemy and one common purpose.

"That purpose is to rid mankind of the monsters of Monarchy and Imperialism, and with them of the whole vampire brood of Peers, Nobles, and Capitalists who, in order that they may live in idleness and sensuality, grind the face of the poor, and drain, drop by drop, the hearts'-blood of toiling millions.

"Its object is to declare that all things are the property of the people. To wrench from the greedy maw of landowners and capitalists their ill-gotten gains, and to restore them to the rightful possessors. To sweep from the face of the earth the fat priests, ministers, and clergy who batten and fatten on the carrion of dead and decaying religions. To preach the gospel of the happiness of man in place of the worship of God, and to declare the day of the great republic, when the many millions who have hitherto been ruled shall become the rulers.

"That this glorious consummation can be attained all at once the Federation is not so sanguine as to expect. Its members know that though they have a lever strong enough to

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move the world they must be content to work slowly. Mankind is a chained giant. Their aim is to set him free; but to do this they must be content to knock off his fetters one by one; and at the last meeting of the World Federation of Freedom it was unanimously agreed to inaugurate the great struggle for personal liberty, firstly, by emancipating Ireland from the English rule, and, secondly, by the overthrowing of Imperialism in Russia.

"The council of the Federation has two reasons for deciding to commence the plan of campaign by freeing Ireland.

"The first is that the members know well that the greatest enemy with which they have to contend — the last country to be convinced of the righteousness of their cause — will be England, that prince-ridden, priest-ridden, peer-ridden nation of flunkeys and enemies of freedom which shed the blood of her own children in America rather than grant them their rightful independence, and now seeks in a similar way to keep Ireland, India, Canada, and Australia under her cruel heel. At England, then, it is right and fitting the first blow should be struck.

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"The other reason is that Ireland, when she is once set free, and in the hands of the Federation, is to be made the basis of future operations. It is very necessary that the Federation should have some such headquarters, and in regard to size (too large a centre is not desirable), shape, situation, and compactness, Ireland possesses peculiar natural advantages for the purpose. An island, surrounded on all sides as by sentries, by the sea, no hostile force can steal upon her under cover and unawares. She is practically the key to Europe, and as a vantage-ground from which to commence operations upon England her position cannot be bettered.

"Is there a single thinking man or woman who cannot see that monarchy and imperialism, peers, clergy, and class distinctions are doomed, and that their utter downfall is only a matter of time? Germany, Russia, Austria, Italy, France, and England are undermined to the very cores by Socialism and Anarchy. The mines which are to destroy society, as society now exists, are laid though they are out of sight, and at any moment the opportunity may come to fire the train. Such an opportunity once occurred

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in France; but what happened then, though it served to show what hatred of its rulers was seething unsuspected in the lowest stratum of society, was a mere accident. But if an accidental outbreak like the French Revolution could set rivers of blood running in France, what may we not expect from the Great Revolution which, when it comes — as come it must — will be the result, not of chance, but of long years of systematic propagation of socialistic principles among the masses, which will be the outcome of the most subtly-planned and gigantic scheme for the liberation of mankind which the world has ever known!

"There are people who will say that what happened on the other side of the Channel can never happen on this. But those who know what is going on in London, Manchester, Birmingham, and all the largest towns, know that we are living on the edge of a volcano; that England is riper for revolution today than France was in 1789, though the danger is as little suspected now as it was then, and that what happened then, and worse, may happen at any time in England unless her councillors have the foresight and the wisdom to

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give to the people what the people will assuredly otherwise *take*.

"It must be remembered that in England we have had for more than half a century a Queen who does not forget that during that time a complete revolution has taken place in many previously existing beliefs and systems, a Queen who knows that England will never tolerate another George IV., who recognises that what was patiently borne sixty, forty, and twenty years ago, will not be endured for a moment to-day, and has wisely avoided everything which can put royalty on its trial or the temper of the people to the test. Hence, though Englishmen know that a day of reckoning between royalty and the people is nigh, they have tacitly consented to put off that day so long as she lives, and to call upon some other and less fortunate sovereign to settle the account. But the account, too long overdue, will soon have to be settled. As well might one man hope to stand against an incoming sea, as well might the courtiers of old King Canute think by their chiding to stay the rude waves from wetting the feet of their royal master, as the rich few think that they can withstand the million of the poor

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when the poor shall arise in their might and their right to claim as their own the riches which their labours have accumulated. In whose hands are those riches now?

"For answer let them look to the words which are written in the very heart of their seething, starving London, over the portico of the Royal Exchange, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.' Yes, the lords', — this duke's, that earl's, — but not God's — if a God there be — or the people's.

"But it is to restore the earth and the fulness thereof to the people that the World Federation of Freedom is fighting. Its cause is the cause of the poor, and it is sacred. Long years of toiling for the bare necessities of life have so broken the spirit of the poor that they have become almost like beasts of burden that wince before a whip in the hands of a child, and bow themselves to the yoke at the bidding of a master whose puny life they could crush out at a blow. It is time that the poor should be made to see the terrible power which, if only by virtue of their swarming millions, lies at their command.

"It is for the people of Great Britain to make

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choice whether they will throw in their lot with the winning side while yet there is time to make terms, or whether they will sacrifice their lives and the lives of their wives and children to support a system by the destruction of which they will be the first to profit. And in making such choice, it must be remembered that they have no longer against them for the purpose of freeing Ireland and of emancipating Russia a handful of patriots, struggling hopelessly against overwhelming odds, but the whole of the secret societies of the world. They have against them the most gigantic and far-reaching organisation which has been formed within the history of man, — an organisation, the wealth and power of which are practically unlimited, — which counts among its members statesmen in every Court in Europe; statesmen who, although they hold the highest offices of trust in their country's councils, are secretly working in connection with the Federation, — an organisation which has spies and eyes in every place, and will spare neither man, woman, nor child in the terrible vengeance which will be visited upon its enemies.

"The people of England, and especially of

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London, will know before the morrow how far-reaching is the arm of the Federation and how pitiless its vengeance. Let them be warned by what will occur this day on the Underground railway, and let them beware lest, by hindering either actively or passively the work of the Federation, they incur that vengeance. — By order.

CAPTAIN SHANNON."

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CHAPTER III

THE "DAILY RECORD" TO THE RESCUE

THREE days after the explosion, the "Daily Record," which had from the first given exceptional prominence to everything connected with the outrages, issued a special supplement, in which, in a letter to the people of England, the editor said that in view of the infamous conspiracy which had been formed against the welfare of the British Empire, and against the lives of British citizens, the proprietors of the "Daily Record" had some months ago decided to bring all their resources, capital, and energy to bear upon the discovery of the promoters of the conspiracy. In the carrying out of this investigation, the services of the very ablest English and foreign detectives had been engaged, their instructions being that, so long as absolute secrecy was observed and ultimate success attained, the question of expense was to remain

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entirely unconsidered. As a result, he was now able to supply the names and, in three cases, personal descriptions and portraits of seven men who were beyond all question the leaders of the movement, and one of whom — though which he regretted he was at present unable to say — the notorious Captain Shannon himself. The proprietors of the "Record" had not intended, he said, to make known their discoveries until the investigation had reached a more forward and satisfactory stage, but in view of what had recently occurred they had decided that it would not be right to withhold any information which might assist in bringing the perpetrators of the diabolical outrage to justice. In conclusion, he announced that the proprietors of the "Daily Record" were prepared to offer the following rewards: —

First, they would pay to any person, by means of whose information the capture had been effected, a reward of £3,000 per head for the arrest of any of the seven men whose names appeared on the list.

Secondly, to any person who would give such information as would lead to the arrest of Captain Shannon, and at the same time

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furnish proof of his identity, they would pay a reward of £20,000.

And in offering these rewards they made no exception in regard to the persons who were eligible to claim them. So long as the person claiming the reward or rewards had supplied the information which led to the arrest or arrests of the individuals indicated, the money should be faithfully paid without question or reservation.

Needless to say the publication of this letter, with the names, and in three cases with portraits, of the men who were asserted to be the leaders of the conspiracy, and the offer of such large rewards, created a profound sensation not only in England and Ireland, but in America and on the Continent.

One or two of the "Daily Record's" contemporaries did not hesitate to censure the action which had been taken as an advertising dodge, and a well-known Conservative organ declared that such a direct insult to the authorities was calculated seriously to injure the national prestige of England; that the Government had made every possible effort to protect society and to bring the perpetrators

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of the recent outrages to book, and that the result of the "Record's" rash and ill-advised procedures would be to stultify the action of the police and to defeat the ends of justice.

On the other hand, the public generally — especially in view of the fact that the "Record" had succeeded in discovering who were the leaders of the conspiracy (which the police had apparently failed to do) — was inclined to give the editor and the proprietors credit for the patriotism they claimed, and it was confidently believed that the offer of so large a reward would tempt some one to turn informer and to give up his confederates to justice.

What the "Daily Record" did for England the "Dublin News" — which had been consistently loyal throughout, and the most fearlessly outspoken of all the Irish Press in its denunciation of Captain Shannon — did for Ireland. It hailed the proprietors and editor of the "Record" as patriots, declaring that, in view of the inefficiency which the Government had displayed in their efforts to protect the public, it was high time that the public should bestir itself and take the matter into its own hand. It reprinted — by the permission of the

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"Record" — the descriptions and portraits of the "suspects," and distributed them broadcast over the country, and it announced that it would add to the amount which was offered by the "Daily Record" for information which would lead to the arrest of Captain Shannon the sum of £5,000.

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CHAPTER IV

THE MURDER IN FLEET STREET

TEN A. M. is a comparatively quiet hour in Fleet Street. The sale of morning papers has practically dropped, and as the second edition of those afternoon journals, of which no one ever sees a first, has not yet been served out to the clamouring and hustling mob at the distributing centres, no vociferating newsboys, aproned with placards of "Sun," "News," "Echo" or "Star," have as yet taken possession of the street corners and pavement kerbs.

On the morning of which I am writing, the newspaper world was sadly in want of a sensation. A royal personage had, it is true, put off the crown corruptible for one which would press less heavily on his brow; but he had, as a pressman phrased it, "given away the entire situation" by allowing himself for a fortnight to be announced as "dying." This,

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Fleet Street resented as unartistic, and partaking of the nature of an anti-climax. Better things, it considered, might have been expected from so eminent an individual; and as such a way of making an end was not to be encouraged, the Press had, as a warning to other royal personages, passed by the event as comparatively unimportant.

It was true, too, that the Heir Apparent had on the previous evening entered a carriage on the Underground Railway as it was on the point of starting, and that the placards of the "special" editions had in consequence announced an "Alarming Accident to the Prince of Wales," which, when H. R. H. had contemptuously remarked that there never had been an approach to danger, was changed in the "extra specials" to "The Prince describes his Narrow Escape."

The incident had, however, been severely commented on as "sensation-mongering" by the morning papers (badly in want of a sensation themselves), and was now practically closed, so that the alliterative artist of the "Morning Advertiser's" placards had nothing better upon which to exercise his ingenuity than a "Con-

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flict among County Councillors," and the "Daily Chronicle's" most exciting contents were a poem by Mr. Richard le Gallienne and a letter from Mr. Bernard Shaw. Nor was anything doing in the aristocratic world. Not a single duke, marquis, earl, viscount, or baron was appearing as respondent or co-respondent in a divorce case, or as actor in any turf or society scandal, and there was a widespread feeling that the aristocracy, as a whole, was not doing its duty to the country.

As a matter of fact, one among many results of the sudden cessation, three months since, of every sort of Anarchistic outrage, had been that the daily papers could not seem other than flat reading to a public which had previously opened these same prints each morning with apprehension and anxiety. Though the vigorous action taken by the editor of the "Daily Record," in London, and of the "Dublin News," in Dublin, had not, as had been expected, led to the arrest of Captain Shannon or his colleagues, it had apparently so alarmed the conspirators as to cause them to abandon their plan of campaign. The general opinion was that Captain Shannon, finding so much

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was known, and that, though his own identity had not been fixed, the personality of the leaders of the conspiracy was no longer a secret, had deemed it advisable to flee the country, lest the offer of so large a reward as £25,000 should tempt the cupidity of some of his colleagues. And as it always had been believed that he was the prime source and author of the whole diabolical conspiracy, the cessation of the outrages was regarded as a natural consequence of his defalcation.

I was thinking of Captain Shannon and of the suddenness with which he had dropped out of public notice while I walked up Fleet Street on this particular morning. As I passed the "Daily Chronicle" buildings and glanced at the placards displayed in the window I could not help contrasting in my mind the unimportant occurrences which were there in small type set forth, with the news of the terrible outrage which had leapt to meet the eye from the same window three months since. Just as I approached the office of the "Daily Record" I heard the sound of the sudden and hurried flinging open of a door, and the next moment a man, wild-eyed, white-faced, and hatless, rushed

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out into the road shouting, "Murder! murder! police! murder!" at the top of his voice.

In an instant the restless, hurrying human streams that ebb and flow ceaselessly in the narrow channel of Fleet Street — like contending rivers running between lofty banks — had surged up in a huge wave around him. In the next a policeman, pushing back the crowd with his right hand and his left, had forced a way to the man's side, inquiring gruffly, "Now then, what's up? And where?"

"Murder! The editor's just been stabbed in his room by Captain Shannon or one of his agents. Don't let any one out. The assassin may not have had time to get away," was the rejoinder.

There are no police officers more efficient and prompt to act than those of the City of London, and on this occasion they acquitted themselves admirably. Other constables had now hurried up, and at once proceeded to clear a space in front of the "Record" office, forming a cordon on each side of the road, and allowing no one to pass in or out.

A messenger was despatched in haste for the nearest doctor, and when guards had been set

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at every entrance to, and possible exit from, the "Record" office, two policemen passed within the building to pursue inquiries, and the doors were shut and locked. Among the crowd outside the wildest rumours and speculations were rife.

"The editor of the 'Record' had been murdered by Captain Shannon himself, who had come on purpose to wreak vengeance for the attitude the paper had taken up in regard to the conspiracy."

"The murderer had been caught red-handed and was now in custody of the police."

"The murderer was concealed somewhere on the premises, and had in his possession an infernal machine with which it would be possible to wreck half Fleet Street."

(This last report had the effect of causing a temporary diversion in favour of the side streets.)

"The murderers had got clean away and the whole staff of the 'Record' had been arrested on suspicion." These and many other rumours were passed from mouth to mouth and repeated with astonishing variations until the arrival of the doctor, who was by various well-informed

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persons promptly recognised as, and authoritatively pronounced to be, Captain Shaw, the Chief Commissioner of Police, the Lord Mayor, and Sir Augustus Harris.

Every door, window, and letter-box became an object of fearsome curiosity. People were half inclined to wonder how they could so many times have passed the "Record" office without recognising something of impending tragedy about the building — something of historic interest in the shape of the very window-panes and key-holes. One man among the crowd attained enviable celebrity by announcing that he "see the editor go up that passage and through that door — the very door where he'd gone through that morning afore he was murdered — scores of times, *and didn't think nothink of it*," which last admission seemed to impress the crowd with the fact that here at least was a fellow whose praiseworthy modesty deserved encouragement.

Meanwhile no sign of anything having transpired was to be seen within the building, and people were beginning to get impatient when, from somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Thames Embankment, came that sound so

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familiar to Cockney ears — a sound which no true Londoner can hear with indifference — the hoarse vociferation of the newsvendors proclaiming some sensational news. At first it was nothing but a distant babel, like the husky barking of dogs, but as it drew nearer the shouts became more distinguishable, and I caught the words, "'Ere yer are, sir! 'Sun,' sir! Murder of a heditor this mornin'! 'Ere yer are, sir!"

"That's smart, that is!" said a fellow who was standing next to me in the crowd. "T. P. O'Connor don't let no grass grow under his feet, 'e don't. Why, the murdered man ain't 'ardly cold, and 'ere it is all in the 'Sun!'"

"Shut yer jaw," said a woman near him. "'T ain't this murder at all — can't yer 'ear?" And then as the moving babel, like a slowly travelling storm-cloud, drew nearer and nearer and finally burst upon Fleet Street, we could make out what the newsvendors were hoarsely vociferating.

"'Ere yer are, sir! 'Sun,' sir! Murder o' the heditor o' the 'Dublin News' this mornin'. Capture o' the hassassin, who turns hinformer. Captain Shannon's name and hidentity disclosed.

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The 'ole 'ideous plot laid bare. 'Ere yer are, sir!"

Elbowing my way as best I could through the crowd, I succeeded at last in getting within a yard or two of a newsboy, and, by offering him a shilling and telling him not to mind the change, possessed myself of a "Sun." This is what I read at the top of the centre page: —

"The editor of the 'Dublin News' was stabbed in the street at an early hour this morning. The murderer was captured and has now turned informer. The police refuse to give any information in regard to what has been divulged, but there is no doubt that Captain Shannon's name and identity have at last been disclosed, and that the whole hideous conspiracy is now laid bare. Further particulars in our next edition."

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CHAPTER V

THE IDENTITY OF CAPTAIN SHANNON DISCLOSED AT LAST

THE news that the captured conspirator had turned informer and divulged the name and identity of Captain Shannon created, as may be supposed, the wildest excitement. Contrary to general expectation, the authorities seemed willing to accord information instead of withholding it, though whether this was not as much due to gratification at finding themselves in the novel position of having any information to accord, as to their desire to allay public anxiety, may be questioned.

The editor of the "Dublin News" had, it seemed, been speaking at a public dinner and was returning between twelve and one o'clock from the gathering. As it was a close night and the room had been hot, he mentioned to a friend that he thought he should walk home instead of driving. This he had apparently done, for a police constable who was standing

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in the shadow of a doorway near the editor's residence saw him turn the corner of the street closely followed by another man who was presumably begging. The editor stopped and put his hand in his pocket as if to search for a coin, and as he did so the supposed beggar struck at him, apparently with a knife. The unfortunate gentleman fell without a cry, and the assassin then stooped over him to repeat the blow, after which he started to run at full speed in the direction of the constable, who drew back within the doorway until the runner was almost upon him, when he promptly tripped his man up and held him down until assistance arrived. When taken to the station the prisoner at first denied, with much bluster, all knowledge of the crime; but when he learned, with evident dismay, that the murder had been witnessed, and saw the damning evidence of guilt in the shape of blood-spattering upon his right sleeve, his bluster gave place to the most grovelling terror, and though he refused to give any account of himself he was removed to a cell in a state of complete collapse.

The next morning his condition was even more abject. The result of his self-commun-

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ings had apparently been to convince him that the hangman's hand was already upon him, and that his only chance of saving his neck lay in turning informer and throwing himself upon the mercy of the authorities. The wretched creature implored the police to believe that he was no assassin by his own choice, and that the murder would never have been committed had he not gone in fear of his life from the spies and agents of Captain Shannon, whose instructions he dared not disobey. He expressed his readiness to reveal all he knew of the conspiracy, and declared that he was not only aware who Captain Shannon was, but actually had a portrait of the arch-conspirator which he was prepared to hand over to the police. He then went on to say that the murder of the editor of the "Dublin News" was to be companioned in London by the murder of the editor of the "Daily Record."

On hearing this last startling piece of news the Dublin police wired immediately to New Scotland Yard and to the London office of the "Daily Record," but the warning arrived at the latter place a few minutes too late, for when the telegram was taken to the editor's room he was found lying stabbed through the heart.

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An alarm was raised as already described, the doors locked, and every one within the building subjected to the severest examination, but all that could be discovered was that a well-groomed and young-looking man, dressed and speaking like a gentleman, had called some ten minutes before, saying that he had an appointment with the editor. He had sent up the name of Mr. Hyram B. Todd, of Boston, and the editor's reply had been, "Show the gentleman in." Why this unknown stranger was allowed access to an editor who is generally supposed to be entirely inaccessible to outsiders, there was not a particle of evidence to show. All that was known was that a minute or two before the murder had been discovered, the supposed Mr. Todd came out from the editor's room, turning back to nod "Good-morning; and thank you very much" at the door, after closing which he left the building. No cry or noise of scuffling had been heard, but, from the fact that the editor was lying face downwards over a table upon which papers were generally kept, it was supposed that he had risen from his chair and walked across the room to this table to look for a manuscript or mem-

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orandum. To do so he must have turned his back upon the visitor, who had apparently seized the opportunity to stab his victim to the heart, and had then left the office just in time to escape detection.

The importance of the arrest which had been made was fully realized when, two days after its occurrence, the name, personal description, and portrait of Captain Shannon were posted up on every police-station in the kingdom, with the announcement that the Government would pay a reward of £5,000 for information which should lead to his arrest.

He was, it seemed, the fourth man on the "Daily Record's" list, his name being James Mullen, an Irish-American, and was described as between forty and fifty years of age, short, and slightly lame. In complexion he was stated to be dark, with brown hair and bushy beard, but his most distinguishable feature was said to be his eyes, which were described as particularly full and fine, with heavy lids.

Then came the portrait, which, the instant I looked at it, startled me strangely. The face as I saw it there was unknown to me; but that somewhere and sometime in my life I had seen

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the face — not of some one resembling this man, but of the very man himself — I was positive, though under what circumstances I could not, for the life of me, remember. I have as a rule an excellent memory, and I attribute this very largely to the fact that I *never allow myself to forget.* Memory, like the lamp which came into the possession of Aladdin, can summon magicians to aid us at call. But memory is a lamp which must be kept bright by constant usage, or it ceases to retain its power. The slave-sprites serve mortals none too willingly, and if, when you rub the lamp, the attendant sprite come not readily to your call, and you, through indolence, allow him to slip back into the blue, be sure that when next you seek his offices he will again be mutinous. And if on that occasion you compel him not, he will become more and ever more slack in his service, and finally will shake off his allegiance and cease to do your bidding at all.

Hence, as I have said, I never *allow myself to forget,* though when I stumble upon a stubborn matter I go like a dog with a thorn in his foot till the thing be found. Such a matter was it to remember where and when I had seen the face

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that so reminded me of Captain Shannon. Day after day went by, and yet, cudgel my brains as I would, I could get no nearer to tracing the connection, and but for sheer obstinacy had pitched the whole concern out of my mind and gone about my business. Sometimes I was nigh persuaded that the thing I sought was sentient and alive, and was dodging me of pure devilry and set purpose. Once it tweaked me, as it were, by the ear, as if to whisper therein the words I was wanting, but when I turned to attend it, lo! it was gone at a bound and was making mouths at me round a corner. It seemed as if — as sportsmen tell us of the fox — the creature rather enjoyed being hunted than otherwise, and entered into the sport with as much zest as the sportsman. Sometimes it cast in my way a colour, a sound, or an odour (I noticed that when I smelt tobacco I seemed, as the children say, to be getting "warmer") which set me off again in wild pursuit and with some promise of success. And then when I had for the fiftieth time abandoned the profitless chase, and, so to speak, returned home and shut myself up within my own walls, it doubled back to give a runaway knock at my door, only to mock me

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when I rushed out by the flutter of a garment in the act of vanishing.

But I was resolved that not all its freaks should avail it ultimately to escape me, for though I had to hunt it through every by-way and convolution of my brain, I was determined to give myself no rest till I had laid it by the heels, — and lay it by the heels I eventually did, as you shall shortly hear.

Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes is of opinion that "Memory, imagination, old sentiments and associations, are more readily reached through the sense of smell than by almost any other channel." The probable reason for this strange connection between the sense of smell and the mind is, he tells us, "because the olfactory nerve is the only one directly connected with the hemispheres of the brain — the part in which we have every reason to believe the intellectual processes are carried on. To speak more truly," he continues, "the olfactory nerve is not a nerve at all, but a part of the brain in intimate connection with its anterior lobes. Contrast the sense of taste as a source of suggestive impressions with that of smell. Now the nerve of taste has no immediate connection with the

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brain proper, but only with the prolongation of the spinal cord."

Curiously enough, it was in connection with a scent that I ultimately succeeded in recalling where and under what circumstances I had seen the face of which I was in search, and but for the fact of my having smelt a particular odour in a particular place this narrative would never have been written.

I have said that when I smelt tobacco I felt that I was, as the children say, "getting warmer." But, unfortunately, tobacco in the shape of pipe, cigar, or cigarette is in my mouth whenever I have an excuse for the indulgence, and often when I have none. Hence, though the face I sought seemed more than once to loom out at me through tobacco smoke, I had watched too many faces through that pleasing mist to be able to recall the particular circumstances under which I had seen the one in question. Nevertheless, it was tobacco which ultimately gave me my clue.

The morning was very windy, and I had three times unsuccessfully essayed to light my cigar with an ordinary match. In despair — for in a general way I hate fusees like poison — I bought

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a box of vesuvians which an observant and enterprising match-vendor promptly thrust under my nose. As I struck the vile thing and the pestilent smell assailed my nostrils, the scene I was seeking to recall came back to me. I was sitting in a third-class smoking carriage on the London, Tilbury, and Southend Railway, and opposite to me was a little talkative man who had previously lit his pipe with a fusee. I saw him take out the box evidently with the intention of striking another, and then I heard a voice say, "For heaven's sake, sir, don't stink the carriage out again with that filthy thing! Pray allow me to give you a match."

The speaker was sitting directly in front of me, and as I recalled his face while I stood there in the street with the still unlighted cigar between my lips, the open box in one hand and the now burnt-out fusee arrested half-way toward the cigar-tip in the other, I knew that his face was the face of Captain Shannon.

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CHAPTER VI

I MAKE UP MY MIND TO FIND CAPTAIN SHANNON

THE striking of that fusee was a critical moment in my life, for before the thing had hissed itself into a black and crackling cinder I had decided to follow up the clue which had been so strangely thrown in my way. My principal reason for so deciding was that I wanted a rest — the rest of a change of occupation, not the rest of inaction. I am by profession what George Borrow would have called "one of the writing fellows." But, much as I love my craft, and generous and large-hearted as I have always found literary men — at all events, large-brained literary men — to be, I cannot profess much admiration for the fussy folk who seem to imagine that God made our world and the infinite worlds around it, life and death, and the human heart, with its joys and sorrows and hope of immortality, for no other reason than that they should have something to write about.

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Instead of recognising that it is only life and the unintelligible mystery of life which make literature of any consequence, they seem to fancy that literature is the chief concern and end of man's being. As a matter of fact, literature is to life what a dog's tail is to his body — a very valuable *appendage;* but the dog must wag the tail, not the tail the dog, as some of these gentry would have us to believe. The dog could, at a pinch, make shift to do without the tail, but the tail could under no circumstances do without the dog.

You may screw a pencil into one end of a pair of compasses and draw as many circles of different sizes as you please, but it is from the other end that you must take your centres, and what the pivot end is to the pencil, life must be to literature.

Hence it is my habit every now and then to put away from me all that is connected with books and the making of books, and to seek only to live my life, and to possess my own soul and this wonderful world about us.

At the particular date of which I am writing, the restlessness which is so often associated with the literary temperament was upon me.

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I craved change, excitement, and adventures, and these the following up of the clue which I held to the identity of Captain Shannon promised in abundance.

As everything depended upon the assumption that James Mullen *was*, as was stated, Captain Shannon, the first question which I felt it necessary seriously to consider was whether the informer's evidence was to be credited; and I did not lose sight of the fact that his confessions, so far from being entitled to be regarded as *bona fide* evidence, were to be received with very grave suspicion. At the *best* they might be nothing more than the invention of one who had no information to give, but who hoped by means of them either to prevent, or at least to stave off for a time, the otherwise inevitable death sentence which was hanging over his head.

At the *worst* it was possible that the pretended Queen's evidence had been carefully prepared beforehand by Captain Shannon, and communicated by him to his agents, to be used in the event of any of them falling into the hands of the police. In that case the statements which might thus be put forward, so far

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from being of assistance to the authorities, would be deliberately constructed with a view to confuse and mislead.

The one thing which I found it utterly impossible to reconcile with the theories I had previously formed about Captain Shannon was that the informer should have in his possession a portrait of his chief.

Was it likely, I asked myself, that so cunning a criminal would, by allowing his portrait to get into the possession of his agents, place himself at the mercy of any scoundrel who, for the sake of an offered reward, would be ready to betray his leader, or of some coward who, on falling into the hands of the police, might offer to turn Queen's evidence? Was it not far more likely, on the contrary, that the explanation of Captain Shannon's having so successfully eluded the police and kept the authorities in ignorance of his very identity was that he had carefully concealed that identity even from his own colleagues?

The more I thought about it the more assured I became that so crafty a man — a man who was not only an artist but a genius in crime — would trust absolutely no one with

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a secret that concerned his own safety. On the few occasions when he would have to come into personal relation with his confederates, it seemed more than probable to me that he would assume some definite and consistent disguise which would mislead even them in regard to his appearance and individuality.

On being asked how the portrait got into his possession, and whether it was a good likeness, the informer had replied that he had only seen Captain Shannon on a single occasion, when he met him one night by appointment at Euston Station. The portrait had been sent home to him beforehand, so that he might have no difficulty in recognizing the person to whom he was to deliver a certain package, and he added that, so far as he could see, it was an excellent likeness.

Some such explanation as this was just what I had expected, for if the portrait were intended, as I supposed, to mislead the police, I was sure that Captain Shannon would invent some plausible story to account for its being in the possession of one of his colleagues. Otherwise the fact of a man, for whose arrest a large reward had been offered, having, for no

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apparent reason, presented his photograph to a fellow-conspirator, might arouse suspicion of the portrait's genuineness.

That the portrait represented not the real but the disguised Captain Shannon, I was equally confident. I thought it more than possible that the man I had to find would be the exact opposite of the man who was there portrayed, and of the informer's description. For instance, as the pictured Captain Shannon was evidently dark, and was said to be dark by the informer, the real Captain Shannon would probably be fair, as the more dissimilar was the real Captain Shannon from the Captain Shannon for whom the police were searching, the less likely would they be to find him.

Then, again, it had been particularly stated by the informer that James Mullen was slightly lame, and to this the police attached the greatest importance. The fact that the man they wanted had an infirmity so easily recognised and so difficult to conceal was considered to narrow down the field of their investigations to the smallest compass and to render the fugitive's ultimate capture nothing less than a certainty.

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For myself, I was not at all sure that this supposed lameness was not part and parcel of Captain Shannon's disguise. A sound man could easily simulate lameness, but a lame man could not so simulate soundness of limb, and I could not help thinking that if Captain Shannon were, as had been asserted, lame, he would have taken care to conceal the fact from his confederates.

If the police could be induced to believe that the man they wanted was lame, they would not, in all probability, be inconveniently suspicious about the movements of a stranger evidently of sound and equal limb, who might otherwise be called on to give an account of himself.

Being curious to know what course they were pursuing, I made it my business within the next few days to scrape an acquaintance with one of the ticket-collectors at Euston. After propitiating him in the usual way by a judicious application of "palm-oil," I ventured to put the question whether he had at any time noticed a short, dark, lame man on the platform where the Irish mail started.

A broad grin came over the fellow's face in reply.

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"What, are they on that lay still!" he said, derisively. "I knew you was after something, but I should n't have took you for a detective."

I assured him that I was *not* a detective, and asked him to explain, whereupon he told me that immediately after the publication of the portrait of Captain Shannon, instructions had been sent to all railway stations that a keen look-out was to be kept for a short, dark, lame man, whether clean-shaven or bearded, and that if a person in any way resembling James Mullen (whose portrait was placed in the hands of every ticket-collector), was noticed, the police should instantly be communicated with.

"Why, if you was to know, sir," said the collector, "'ow many short, dark, respectable gents, what 'appens to be lame, have been took up lately on suspicion, you 'd larf, you would. It 's bad enough to be lame at hany time, but when you 're going to be harrested for a han-archist as well, it makes your life a perfect misery, it do."

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CHAPTER VII

MY FIRST MEETING WITH JAMES MULLEN

AND now it is high time that I told the reader something more about the circumstances under which I had seen James Mullen, and why I was so positive that he and the man in whose company I had travelled down to Southend were one and the same person.

Firstly, it must be remembered that I sat opposite to my travelling companion for more than an hour, during which time I had watched him narrowly; and secondly, that there are some faces which, once seen, one never forgets. Such a face was the face of the man I had seen on that eventful journey. His eyes were bright, prominent, and had heavy lids. His complexion was clear and pale, and his nose was well shaped, though a little too pronouncedly aquiline. The nostrils were very unusual, being thin and pinched, but arching upward so curiously that one might almost

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fancy a part of the dilatable cuticle on each side had been cut away. The finely-moulded chin was like the upper lip and cheek, clean-shaven, and the lips were full and voluptuous. Thick but fine and straight, straw-coloured hair was carefully brushed over a well-formed forehead, and the face, taken altogether, was decidedly distinguished, if not aristocratic, in the firmness of outline and the shaping of the features.

After the train had started, Mullen sank back into his seat and appeared to be thinking intently. I noticed that his eyes were never still a moment, but darted restlessly from object to object in a way which seemed to indicate great brain excitability. That he was excitable was clear from his vehement outburst about the fusee; but almost the next minute he had, so to speak, made amends for his apparent rudeness by explaining that he was peculiarly sensitive to smell, and had an especial dislike to fusees.

Nevertheless the sudden change in the expression of his face at the moment of the outbreak was remarkable. The previously smooth and unpuckered brows gathered themselves

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together into two diagonal wrinkles that met above the nose, which had in the meantime become beak-like, and the effect recalled in some curious way a bird of prey. He was soon all smiles again; but once or twice throughout the journey, when his thoughts were presumably unpleasant, I caught the same expression, and it was the fact of my seeing in the photograph this same unmistakable expression on the face of a man who was apparently a different person which had set me fumbling with such uncertain hand among the dog's-eared pages of the past. The eyes, the hawk-like wrinkling of the brows, and the nose and nostrils were of course the same, but the addition of the beard, the evident swarthiness of the skin, and darkening of the hair led to my failing at first to connect the portrait with my fellow-passenger to Southend. But the missing link was no sooner found and the connection established than I felt that the identity of Mullen with the man I had seen in the train admitted of no uncertainty, especially as, after examining under a powerful lens, the photograph which the informer had given to the police, I satisfied myself that the beard was false.

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My next step was to set on foot an inquiry into Mullen's family history and antecedents. I hoped, and in fact believed, that the clue which I held to his identity would in itself enable me to trace him, but at the same time I fully recognised that circumstances might arise which would render that clue useless and throw me back upon such information as could be ascertained apart from it. That I should not be unprepared for such a contingency was very necessary, and I therefore commissioned a private detective named Green, whom I knew to be able and trustworthy, to ferret out for me all that could be discovered of Mullen's past.

Having wished him good-bye and good luck, I started for Southend, whither I intended journeying in the company of the little talkative man with whom Mullen had had the brush about the fusees. I thought it more than likely that he was a commercial traveller, partly because of the deferential stress and frequency with which he interpolated the word "sir" into any remarks he chanced to make, and partly because of the insinuating politeness with which he addressed Mullen and myself — politeness which seemed to suggest that he had accus-

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tomed himself to look upon every one with whom he came into contact as a possible customer, under whose notice he would one day have occasion to bring the excellence of his wares, and with whom, therefore, he was anxious to be on good terms.

That he lived at Southend I knew from an observation he had let fall; and after watching the barrier at Fenchurch Street station for a couple of hours, I saw him enter an empty third-class smoking compartment five minutes before the departure of an evening train. Half-a-crown slipped into the guard's hand, with a request that he would put me into the same carriage and reserve it, effected the desired result, and when the train moved out of the station the little man and myself had the compartment to ourselves.

I knew from what I had heard of my companion's remarks on the occasion when I had journeyed to Southend with him that, though talkative and inquisitive, he was also shrewd and observant, as men of his occupation generally are, and as it would be necessary to ask him two or three pertinent questions, I thought it advisable to let the first advance come from him.

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That he was already eyeing me in order to ascertain whether an overture towards sociability was likely to meet with a welcome, I could see. The result was apparently satisfactory, for after an introductory cough he inquired whether I would like the window up or down.

Always beware on a railway journey, when you wish to be left to the company of your newspaper, of the man who is unduly anxious for your comfort. 'T were wise to roar him at once into silence, for your gentle answer, instead of turning away wrath, is often too apt to beget it. Speak him civilly, and you deliver yourself bound into his hands; for you have scarce made your bow of acknowledgment, sunk back into your place and taken up your paper again, before his tongue is hammering banalities about the weather at the thick end of the wedge he has inserted.

In the present instance, as the little man sat facing the engine and with the wind blowing directly in his face, whereas I was on the opposite and sheltered side, the window rights were, according to the unwritten laws of the road, entirely at his disposal. But as it suited my purpose to show a friendly front to his advances,

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I protested with many thanks that I had no choice in the matter, and awaited with composure the inevitable observation about the probability of rain before morning. From the weather and the crops we got to the results of a wet summer to seaside places generally, and thence to Southend. I remarked that I thought of taking a house there, and asked him about the residents.

"Oh, Southend is very much like other places of the sort," he answered. "It's got a great many pleasant and a few objectionable folks. There are the local celebrities (eminent nobodies I call them), who, it is true, are very important personages indeed, their importance in Southend being only equalled by their utter insignificance and total extinction outside that locality. And there's a good sprinkling of gentlemen with 'sporting' tendencies. I must tell you, by the bye, that the qualities which constitute a man a sportsman in Southend are decided proclivities towards cards, billiards, and whisky — especially whisky. But take the Southend folk all round they're the pleasantest of people, and a chummier little place I never knew."

I made a great show of laughing at the little

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man's description, which, as he evidently laid himself out to be a wit, put him in the best of humours with himself and with me, and I then went on to say that I thought he and I had travelled down together on another occasion, and reminded him of the fusee incident.

He replied that he did not recollect me, which was not to be wondered at, for I had sat well back in the darkest corner, and had taken no part in the conversation. "But I remember the man who objected so to the fusee," he went on with a smile. "He *did* get excited over it, didn't he?"

I said that he certainly had done so, and asked with apparent unconcern whether the man in question was a friend.

"No, I can't say that he's a friend," was the answer; "but I've travelled down with him several times, and always found him very pleasant company."

I was glad to hear this, for it satisfied me that the fact of my having seen Mullen in the South-end train was not due to a chance visit which might never have been repeated. Had it been so the difficulty of my undertaking would have been enormously increased, for I should then

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have held a clue only to his identity, whereas I had now a clue to his whereabouts as well.

"But now you mention it" (which, as I had nothing to mention, was not the case), my companion went on, "now that you mention it — though it had never struck me before — it is rather strange that, though I 've seen our friend several times in the train, I have never once seen him anywhere in Southend. In a place like that you are bound to see any one staying there, and in fact I 've often knocked up against the same people half a dozen times in an evening, first on the cliffs, then on the pier, and after that in the town. But I can't recall ever once seeing our fusee friend anywhere. It seems as if when he got to Southend he vanished into space."

I looked closely at my companion, lest the remark had been made with intentional significance and indicated that he himself entertained suspicions of Mullen's object in visiting Southend. Such was apparently not the case, however, for after two or three irrelevant observations he got upon the subject of politics, and continued to bore me with his own very positive ideas upon the matter for the rest of the journey.

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If Mullen were hiding in the neighbourhood of Southend, the chances were that he was somewhere on board a boat. To take a house of any sort would necessitate the giving of references, and might lead to inquiries, and, on the other hand, the keepers of hotels and lodging-houses are often inconveniently inquisitive, and their servants are apt to gossip and pry. If Mullen had a small yacht lying off the town, and lived on board, as men with the yachting craze sometimes do, the only person who need know anything about his movements would be the paid hand, or skipper, and it would be comparatively easy to find a suitable man who was not given to gossip, and to engage him under some explanation which would effectually prevent his entertaining any suspicion as to his employer's identity.

Before commencing my search for Mullen, I thought it advisable to look up an old friend of mine, Hardy Muir, a painter, who lives a mile or two out of Southend.

I was sure he would join heart and soul in an enterprise which had for its object the hunting down of such an enemy of the race as Captain Shannon; but to have taken him into my con-

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fidence would have been ill-advised, for had we succeeded in laying hands upon that arch-conspirator, no one could have prevented Muir from then and there pounding the monster into a pulp. Personally I had no objection to such a proceeding, but as I considered that the ends of justice would be better served by the handing over to the authorities of Captain Shannon's person in the whole, rather than in pieces, I decided to withhold from my impetuous friend the exact reason for my being in South-end.

As a matter of fact, it was not his assistance that I needed, but that of a very quiet-tongued, shrewd, and reliable man named Quickly, who was employed by Muir as skipper of his yacht. It occurred to me that Quickly would be the very person to find out what I wanted to know about the boats, concerning which I was unable to satisfy myself. Men of his class gossip among themselves very freely, and inquiries made by him would seem as natural as the curiosity of the servants' hall about the affairs of masters and mistresses, whereas the same inquiries made by me, a stranger, would be certain to arouse suspicion, and might even reach

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the ears of Mullen himself were he in the neighbourhood.

"All serene, my boy," said Muir, when I told him that I wanted Quickly's help for a few days on a matter about which I was not at liberty to speak for the present. "You 're just in time. Quickly was going out with me in the boat, but I 'll call him in."

"Quickly," he said, when the skipper presented himself, "this is my friend Mr. Max Rissler, whom you know. Well, Mr. Rissler's a very particular friend of mine, and by obliging him you 'll be obliging me. He 's to be your master for the next day or two, and I want you to do just as he tells you, and to keep your mouth shut about it. Now Mr. Rissler 's going to have some lunch with me. In the meantime, you go into the kitchen and play "Rule Britannia" on the cold beef and beer, and be ready to go into Southend with him by the next train, as he 's in a hurry and wants to set to work this afternoon."

And set to work we did that very afternoon, the plan pursued being to make out a list of all the vessels lying off the neighbourhood, and to ascertain the owners, and whether there was

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any one else on board. The task was not difficult, as Quickly seemed to know the name and history of almost every craft afloat, but the result was disappointing, for not all our inquiries could discover any one answering to Mullen's description, or indeed any one whose presence was not satisfactorily accounted for.

Even the Nore lightship, which lies several miles out to sea, was not forgotten, for the very first idea which occurred to me in connection with Southend and Mullen was, what a snug and out-of-the-world hiding-place the vessel would make, were it possible to obtain shelter there.

Had there been only one man in charge, it was not inconceivable that he might — like the jailer who assisted the head centre, James Stephen, to escape from Dublin jail in 1865 — have been a secret sympathizer with the conspirators, or at all events in their pay, and that a fugitive who could offer a sufficiently tempting bribe might succeed in obtaining shelter and the promise of silence.

I found on inquiry, however, that there was quite a crew on board, and that the lightship is frequently visited by the Trinity House boats,

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so the chance of any one being concealed there was out of the question. But though I dismissed the lightship from my consideration, I could not help asking myself if there might not be some similar place in the neighbourhood of Southend to which the objection which rendered the Nore lightship impossible as a hiding place would not apply, and even as I did so the thought of the dynamite hulks off Canvey Island occurred to me.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE DYNAMITE HULK

NO one who has not visited Canvey would believe that so lonely and out-of-the-world a spot could exist within thirty miles of London. Just as we sometimes find, within half-a-dozen paces of a great central city thoroughfare, where the black and pursuing streams of passengers who throng its pavements never cease to flow, and the roar of traffic is never still, some silent and unsuspected alley or court into which no stranger turns aside, and where any sound but that of a slinking footstep is seldom heard,—so, bordering the great world-thoroughfare of the Thames, is to be found a spot where life seems stagnant, and where scarcely one of the thousands who pass within a stone's throw has ever set foot.

Where the Thames swings round within sight of the sea, there lies, well out of the sweep of the current, a pear-shaped island, some six

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miles long and three miles broad, which is known as Canvey.

Three hundred years ago it was practically uninhabitable, for at high tide the marshes were flooded by the sea, and it was not until 1623 that James I. invited a Dutchman named Joas Croppenburg and his friends to settle there, offering them a third for themselves if they could reclaim the island from the sea. This offer the enterprising Dutchman accepted, and immediately set to work to build a sea-wall, which so effectually protects the low-lying marsh-land, that, standing inside it, one seems to be at a lower level than the water, and can see only the topmost spars and sails of the apparently bodiless barges and boats which glide ghost-like by.

But the most noticeable features in the scenery of Canvey are the evil-looking dynamite hulks which lie scowling on the water like huge black and red-barred coffins. Upwards of a dozen of these nests of devilry are moored off the island, and they are the first objects to catch the eye as one looks out from the sea wall.

In view of the fact that the position of Canvey in regard to one of the greatest water high-

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ways in the world is like that of a house which lies only a few yards back from a main road, one wonders at first that such a locality should have been selected as the storage place of so vast a quantity of a deadly explosive. That it was so selected only after the matter had received the most careful and serious consideration of the authorities is certain; and though very nearly the whole of the shipping which enters the Thames must necessarily pass almost within hail of the island, the spot is so remote and out of the world that it is doubtful if any safer or securer place could have been found.

The dynamite magazines consist, as the name indicates, of the dismantled hulks of old merchant vessels, which, though long past active service, are still water-tight. One man only is in charge of each hulk, which he is not supposed to leave, everything that he needs being obtained for him by the boatman, whose sole duty it is to fetch and carry for the hulk-keepers.

Not only is a hulk-keeper who happens to be married forbidden to have his children with him, but even the presence of his wife is disallowed, his instructions being that no one but

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himself is under any circumstances to come on board.

These rules are not, however, very rigidly complied with. A hulk-keeper is only human, and as his life is lonely it often happens that when visitors row out to the ship he is by no means displeased to see them, and half-a-crown will frequently procure admittance, not only to his own quarters, but to the hold where the explosive itself is stored in small oblong wooden boxes, each containing fifty pounds. Nor are instances unknown where the solitude of a married hulk-keeper's life has been cheered by the presence of his wife, the good lady joining her husband immediately after an inspection and remaining with him until such time as another visit may be looked for. Even if the fact of her presence on board becomes known on the island the matter is considered as nobody's business but the inspector's, and the love of an officer of the Crown is not so great among watermen and villagers as to lead them to go out of their way to assist him in the execution of his duty.

Had I not had reason to suppose that Mullen was somewhere in the neighbourhood of South-

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end, the possibility of his being on one of these hulks would never have occurred to me. But the more I thought of it the more I was impressed with the facilities which such a place afforded for a fugitive to lie in hiding, and I promptly decided that before I dismissed the hulks from my consideration I must first satisfy myself that the man I was looking for was on none of them.

A point which I did not lose sight of was that it was quite possible for a hulk-keeper who was taciturn by nature, and not prone to encourage gossip, to remain in entire ignorance of what was taking place throughout the country, and of the reward which had been offered for the apprehension of Captain Shannon. In fact there is at this moment in charge of one of the hulks off Canvey a man who is never known to go ashore, to receive visitors, or to enter into conversation. Whether he is unable to read I cannot say, but at all events he never asks for a newspaper, so that it is conceivable that he may not know — happy man! — whether the Conservatives or Liberals are in power, or whether England is ruled by Queen Victoria or by Edward the Seventh.

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The first thing to be done was to make out a list of the dynamite hulks — just as I had made a list of the boats off Southend — and then to take the vessels one by one and satisfy myself that no one was there in hiding. I need not more fully describe the details of the various inquiries than to say that, in order to avoid attracting attention, they were made as at Southend by the waterman Quickly.

Most of the hulks are moored in the creek within sight of Hole Haven, where the principal inn of the island is situated, and all these we were soon able to dismiss from our calculation. But there was one hulk, the "Cuban Queen," lying, not in the shelter of the creek, but in a much more lonely spot directly off Canvey, in regard to which I was not able to come to a conclusion. It lay in deeper water, nearly a mile out, and no one seemed to know much about the man in charge except that he was named Hughes and was married. He very rarely came on shore, but when he did so, returned immediately to his ship without speaking to anybody, and it was generally believed on the island that he often had his wife with him. That he *had* some one, — wife or otherwise, —

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on board I soon satisfied myself, and that by very simple means.

The man whose duty it was to wait upon the hulk-keepers was, I found, a methodical sort of fellow and kept a memorandum book in which he wrote down the different articles he was instructed to obtain. This book Quickly managed to get hold of for me, and on looking over it I saw that from a certain time, — dating some months back, — the supply of provisions ordered by Hughes had doubled in quantity. This might, of course, be due to the fact that his wife was on board; and, indeed, Quickly reported that the hulk attendant had remarked to him, "Hughes have got his old woman on the 'Cuban Queen.' I see her a-rowing about one night in the dinghy." But I had made another and much more significant discovery when looking over the book, — a discovery which the presence of Hughes' wife did not altogether explain. This was *that not only had the quantity of food supplied to Hughes been largely increased, but that the quality too was vastly superior.*

The man in attendance on the hulk had probably failed to notice this fact, and I did not

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deem it advisable to arouse his suspicion by making further inquiries. But I at once decided that before I put against the name of the "Cuban Queen" the little tick which signified that I might henceforth dismiss it from consideration, I should have to make the personal acquaintance of "Mrs. Hughes."

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CHAPTER IX

I TAKE UP MY QUARTERS AT CANVEY

UP to this point I had, as far as possible, avoided visiting the island myself, but I now came to the conclusion that the time had come when it would be necessary to carry on my investigations in person. Fortunately there was not wanting an excuse by which I could do so without arousing suspicion. My friend Muir, who is an ardent sportsman, rents a part of Canvey to shoot over. Hence he is a very familiar figure there, and is known and loved by every man, woman, child, and dog. To go as his friend would, I knew, insure me a ready welcome, so I got him to row me over once or twice in his boat, and then, when we had been seen frequently in each other's company, to ask the landlord of the inn at Hole Haven to find me a bed for a week or two, as I was a friend of his who had come to Canvey for some shooting. By this means I was able to

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keep a constant watch upon the "Cuban Queen" without being noticed by Hughes, for the sea-wall, as I have elsewhere said, was so high that, standing outside, one is invisible from the water, but anybody inside, who wishes to look out to sea, can walk up the sloping bank on the inner side of the wall until his eyes are level with the top, and then can peer through the long weedy grasses without attracting attention.

A week passed uneventfully, and then Muir came over, accompanied by Quickly, for an afternoon's shooting. After a late lunch we made our way on foot, and inside the sea-wall, towards the eastern end of the island. My interest in the sport was not very keen, for I was keeping half an eye meanwhile upon the hulk; but by the time we started to retrace our steps it was becoming dark. Just as we reached the point off which the "Cuban Queen" was lying I fancied I heard the stealthy dip of oars, and asking Muir and Quickly to wait a moment, I peered over the sea-wall. Some one was coming on shore from the "Cuban Queen" under cover of twilight, and instead of making for the usual "hard" at Hole Haven, the oarsman, whoever he might be, clearly intended effecting a land-

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ing in some more secluded spot. I stole softly back to Muir and Quickly, telling them what I had seen, and asking them to crouch down with me under cover of some bushes to wait events.

That there were two persons in the boat was evident, for in another minute we heard the grinding of the keel upon the shingle, followed by a few whispered words. A low voice said, "Pass me out the parcel and I'll push her off." Again we heard the stones scrunch as the boat was slid back into the water. "Good-nights" were exchanged, and receding oar-dips told us that the boat was returning to the hulk. Then somebody climbed the sea-wall, and stood still for half a minute as if looking around to make sure that no one was in sight. Our hiding-place was fortunately well in shadow, and we ran very little risk of discovery, but it was not until the person who had landed had turned and taken some steps in the opposite direction that I ventured to lift my head. Night was fast closing in, but standing as the new-comer was upon the sea-wall, silhouetted against the darkening sky, I could distinctly see that the figure was a woman's. "Hughes' old woman, zur," Quickly whispered in my ear; but I motioned to him

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to be silent, and so we remained for a few seconds.

Then Muir spoke, with evident disgust, and not in a whisper either: "Look here, Master Max Rissler, eaves-dropping and foxing about after women is n't in my line. You have n't told me what your little game is, and I have n't asked you. I 've a great respect for you, as you know, but if you 're playing tricks with that poor devil's wife, why, damme, man, I 'd as soon knock your jib amidships as look at you."

I could have strangled the big-hearted blundering Briton, but had to content myself with shaking a fist at him and grinding my teeth with vexation until I grinned, for "Mrs. Hughes" was still within earshot. It did not lessen my annoyance to know, from the approving grimace which I could feel, rather than see, on the generally expressionless face of Quickly, that he also credited me with evil designs upon "Mrs. Hughes," and shared his master's sentiments.

Him too I was strongly moved to strangle; and that I resisted the temptation was due chiefly to the fact that I had present need of his services.

"Look here, old man!" I said to Muir when

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I thought it safe to speak. "Did you ever know me do a dirty action?"

"Never, my boy," he responded promptly.

"Well I *can't* tell you my purpose in this business just now, except to say that if you knew it you'd be with me heart and soul, and that if my surmise is right the person we have just seen dressed like a woman is n't a woman at all but a man. He is n't going to Hole Haven, for he 's just turned down the path that leads to the ferry at Benfleet. It looks as if he meant catching the nine o'clock train for London from Southend. He must be followed, but not by me, and for two reasons: the first is that while he 's away I must get by hook or by crook upon the "Cuban Queen;" the second is that I don't want him to see me, as in that case he 'd know me again. Will you trust me that all 's square until I can tell you the whole story, and in the meantime will you let Quickly follow that man and try to find out for me where he goes? It is most important that I should know."

"All serene, my boy," said Muir, slapping his great hand into mine too vigorously to be altogether pleasant, and too loudly to be discreet under the circumstances. "All serene; I 'll trust

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you up to the hilt; and I'm sorry I spoke. Do what you like about the skipper, and I'll never ask a question."

I turned to Quickly: "Can you get round to the station without being seen, before that person gets there, so that he shan't suppose he's followed?"

"Ees zur," said Quickly, "if I go through the churchyard and cross yon field."

"Off you go, then," I said. "Here are three pounds for expenses. Get to the station before he does and keep an eye for him from the window of the men's waiting-room, where he can't see you. If he goes into any waiting-room it will have to be into the ladies', while he has that dress on. So you go into the general room. But take tickets before he gets there, one to Shoeburyness, which is as far as the line goes one way, and the other to London, which is as far as it goes in the opposite direction. If he waits for the next down train, you wait too, and go where he goes, but if he takes the up train to London, slip out and into the same train when his back is turned. Wherever he goes, up or down, you're to go too, and when he gets out, shadow him, without being seen

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yourself, and make a note of any place he calls at. Then when you've run him to earth, telegraph to Mr. Muir at the inn here — not to me —saying where you are, and I 'll join you next train. But keep your eyes open at all the stations the train stops at to see he does n't get out and give you the slip. Do this job well and carry it through and there 'll be a couple of ten-pound notes for you when you get back. And now be off."

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CHAPTER X

I BOARD THE "CUBAN QUEEN"

THE opportunity to pay a surprise visit to the "Cuban Queen" in the absence of "Mrs. Hughes" had come at last, and as I had already hit upon a plan by which I might carry out my purpose, without giving Hughes cause to suspect that my happening upon him was other than accidental, I proceeded at once to put it into effect.

Telling Muir that I would rejoin him at the inn before long, I slipped off my clothes, tossed them together in a heap on the beach with a big stone atop to keep them from being blown away, and plunged into the water. I am a strong swimmer, and the tide was running out so swiftly that when I reached the "Cuban Queen," which was moored about a mile from shore, I was not in the least "winded," and indeed felt more than fit to fight my way back against the current. But, in order that the game should work out as I had planned, it was necessary for me to assume the appearance of being extremely

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exhausted. Hence when I found myself approaching the hulk I began to make a pretence of swimming feebly, panting noisily meanwhile, and sending up the most pitiful cries for help.

As I had expected and intended, Hughes came on deck, and looking over the ship's side inquired loudly, "Wot's the —— row?"

Hughes, I may here remark, was, as I soon discovered (you could not be in his company for half a minute without doing so), a man of painfully limited vocabulary. Perhaps I should say that his colour sense had been developed at the expense of his vocabulary, for if he did not see everything in a rose-coloured light, he certainly applied one adjective, vividly suggestive of crimson, to every object which he found it necessary to particularise.

"Wot's the —— row?" he repeated, when there was no immediate reply to his question.

"Help!" I gasped faintly, pretending to make frantic clutches at a mooring chain, and clinging to it as if half dead with exhaustion and fear.

"Who are yer?" he inquired suspiciously, "an' how'd yer get 'ere?"

I was anxious to play my part so as not to

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arouse his suspicion, hence I did not reply for at least a minute, but continued to pant, gasp, and cough, until my breath might reasonably be supposed to have returned, and then I said faintly, "Help me to get on board and I'll tell you."

"You can't coom aboord," he answered surlily. "No one ain't allowed aboord these ships."

"I *must*," I said, with as much appearance of resolution as was consistent with the half-drowned condition which I had assumed.

"Must yer?" he said. "We'll —— soon see about that," and then for the second time he put the question, "Who are yer, and 'ow 'd yer get out 'ere?"

I replied, in sentences suitably abbreviated to telegraphic terseness, that my name was Max Rissler. Was a friend of Mr. Hardy Muir. Was staying at Canvey for shooting. Had thought would like a swim. Had got on all right till I had tried to turn, and then had found current too strong. Had become exhausted, and must have been drowned if had not fortunately been carried past hulk.

Hughes evidently considered the explanation

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satisfactory, for his next question was not about myself but about my intentions.

"And what are you going to do now?"

"Come on board," I answered promptly.

"Yer can't do that," he said. "No one ain't allowed aboord these —— boats."

"I must," I replied. "This is a case where you 'd get into trouble for keeping the rules, not for breaking them. You can't talk about rules to a half-drowned man. It would be manslaughter. Help me on board and get me some brandy — I suppose you 've some by you — and I 'll pay you well and not say a word to any one. And be quick about it for I can't hold on here much longer. You 'll be half-a-sovereign the richer for this night's job, and if you 're quick I 'll make it a sovereign."

Grumbling audibly about it being "a —— fine lay this — making a poor man run the risk of getting the sack because —— fools choose to play the —— monkey," he unlashed the dinghy, and having brought her round to where I was clinging, he assisted me in, and with a few dexterous strokes took us to the side of the hulk over which a rope ladder was hanging. "Afore you go aboord," he growled,

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putting a detaining hand upon my arm, "'ave yer got any hiron concealed about yer person?"

"Iron?" I said. "What do you mean? And where could I conceal anything? Every stitch of my clothes is lying over there on the beach."

"My instructions is," he replied doggedly, "that I hask hevery one wot comes aboord this boat whether they've got any hiron concealed about 'em. That's my dooty an' I does it. 'Ave you or 'ave you not got hiron on your person?"

"Certainly not," I said, "unless the iron in my blood's going to be an objection. And now stop this fooling and get me some spirit as fast as you can for I'm half dead."

As a matter of fact, I was beginning to feel chilled to the bone, besides which it was very necessary I should keep up the *rôle* I had assumed.

Hughes disappeared below, but soon returned with half a tumbler of rum and water and a dirty, evil-smelling blanket. The rum I tossed off gratefully, but the blanket I declined.

"Very well," said Hughes. "But you look as white as a —— sheet already, and you'll find

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it none too warm going back in the dinghy with nothing on."

"I'm not going back in the dinghy with nothing on, my good fellow," I replied calmly. "You've got a fire or a stove of some sort below, I suppose, and I'm going down to sit by it while you row back and get my clothes for me. Then you can put me ashore, and I shall have much pleasure in handing you over the sovereign I've promised you, on condition you give me your word not to speak of this fool's game of mine. I don't want to be made the laughing-stock of the island. I told them I was a good swimmer, and if they heard that I had to sing out for help and had to be taken back to shore like a drowned kitten I should never hear the last of it, especially from that big brute of a Muir who's always bragging about his own swimming."

Something like a grin stole over the fellow's forbidding face.

"Muster Muir 'e don't like no soft-plucked uns, 'e don't; and you did sing out —— loud, and no mistake. You told un you could swim, did ye? Why, Muster Muir, I seen him swim out two mile and more, and then —"

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"Confound Mr. Muir," I interrupted angrily. "Do you think I 'm going to stay here all night while you stand there jawing and grinning. Be off with you and get my clothes for me or you won't see a halfpenny of the pound I promised you."

"It was two poun' as you promised me," said the fellow, lying insolently, now that he had — as he thought he had — me in his power. "And —— little too for a man wot 's running the risk of getting the billet by lettin' strangers on boord, dead against the rools. But I don't leave my ship for no —— two pounds, I don't. You 'll 'ave to come along wi' me in the dinghy; an' mind I 'as the money afore you 'as the clothes. None of your monkey tricks with me, I tell yer. Come, wot 's it to be? Are you going back wi' me, or will you wait for Mr. Muir to come and fetch yer? I can let 'im know in the morning (this with an impudent grin) as you 've been rescooed."

"I don't go ashore without my clothes if I stop here all night," I said firmly; "it 's inhuman to ask me. What harm could I do to the confounded ship for the few minutes you 're away? I don't want to stay here any longer

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than I can help, I assure you. It was a sovereign I promised you; but if you 'll row ashore as fast as you can and get my clothes, and promise to keep your mouth shut, you shall have two pounds. Will that please you?"

"Make it three," said he, "and I 'll say done."

"Very well," I answered, "only be as quick as you can, for the sooner I 'm out of this thieves' den and have seen the last of your hangman face the better. And now I 'll go down out of the cold; and perhaps you won't grudge me another dram of that rum of yours, considering how you 've bled me to-night."

Motioning me to follow, he led the way to the stern of the ship, where, as I knew, the hulk-keeper's quarters were situated, the dynamite being stored, as I have already said, in the hold.

A cockpit, from which there shot up into the night an inverted pyramid of yellow light, marked the entrance to the cabin, and into this Hughes, disdainful of stairs, shuffled feet foremost, swinging a moment with his palm resting on either ledge and his body pillared by rigid arms before he dropped out of sight, like

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a stage Mephistopheles returning to his native hell. Not being familiar with the place, I decided to content myself with a less dramatic entrance, and picked my way accordingly down the steep stairs and into the little cabin which served as kitchen, sitting-room, and dormitory. A lighted oil-stove stood in the centre, beside which Hughes placed a wooden chair.

"You've got very comfortable quarters here," I said, looking round approvingly after I had seated myself. "If one does n't mind a lonely life (it *is* lonely I suppose?), one might do worse than turn hulk-keeper."

Hughes grunted by way of reply, but whether this was to be taken as signifying acquiescence or dissent I was unable to say, his face being at the moment hidden in a corner locker, whence he presently emerged with a bottle of Old Tom and a glass.

"There 's the —— rum, and there 's the —— glass; and now don't you stir out of that —— chair," he said, with a liberal use of his favourite adjective. Then, much to my relief, he betook himself up the stairs and on to the deck, where I could hear him muttering and swearing to himself as he unlashed the dinghy.

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That I was excited and eager, the reader may believe; but though, the moment Hughes' back was turned, my eyes were swivelling in their sockets and sweeping the sides of the cabin with the intentness of a search-light, I did not think it advisable to leave my seat and set about the search in earnest until he had actually left the hulk. But no sooner was he well out of the way than I was at work, with every sense as poised and ready to pounce as a hovering hawk.

Not often in my life have I experienced so bitter a disappointment. I had hoped great things of this visit to the "Cuban Queen;" but though I searched every part of the hulk, including the hold, which, as there happened at that moment to be no dynamite on board, was not secured, I found no evidence as to the sex of Hughes' visitor. To describe the fruitless search in detail is unnecessary. Whoever "Mrs. Hughes" might be, she had evidently taken pains to insure that every trace of her presence should be removed. I could not even tell whether she had shared the sleeping bunk with Hughes, for the coverings had been stripped off, leaving the bare boards without so much as

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a pillow, and the entire cabin had apparently been turned out and scrubbed from end to end immediately before or after her departure.

The visit from which I hoped so much had proved a lamentable failure. I was not one penny the wiser and three pounds poorer for my trouble, not to speak of having got a chill, of which I should think myself cheaply rid if it ended in nothing worse than a cold.

"The scheming rascal," I said to myself. "I might have known he would n't have let me down here if he had n't been aware that every sign of his having a companion on board had been cleared away. I suppose the secret of it all is that he has got word that the inspector 's coming to pay the hulks a visit shortly, and he 's packed off Mrs. Hughes until it 's all over. Very likely she set things straight herself before she went. All his pretended reluctance to go for my clothes and to leave me here was put on that he might bleed me to the tune of another pound. I should only be serving him out in his own coin if I gave information that he 's had a woman on board.

"If it *was* a woman? It 's very odd, though, that she has n't left some little sign of her sex

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behind her — a hairpin, a button, or a bonnet-pin. There are only short hairs (Hughes' evidently) on the brush and comb, but she may have had her own and have taken them with her. But anyhow I might have expected to find, if not some hair-combings, at least a stray hair or two which would have let me into the secret, and the neighbourhood of the mirror's the most likely place to find them."

But, search as I would, not a single hair could I find, and in another half-minute the near dip of oars announced Hughes' return. As I heard him jerk the sculls from the rowlocks, and the grinding of the dinghy against the ship's side, I took another despairing look around in the hopes of lighting on something that had hitherto escaped my notice. One object after another was hastily lifted, investigated, and as hastily put down, but always with the same result. As I heard Hughes' step upon the deck my eyes fell upon a little square of soap which had fallen to the floor and had escaped the notice — probably of Hughes as well as of myself — on account of its being hidden by the corner of an oilskin which was hanging from the wall. This oilskin I had taken down to overhaul, and it

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was when replacing it that I found the soap, which I saw, when I lifted it, was of better quality than one would expect to find in such a place. It was still damp from recent usage, and as I turned it over two or three hairs came off from the under side and adhered to my hand. As I looked at them I gave a low, long, but almost silent, whistle. They were beyond question the bristles of a shaving brush which was fast going to pieces from long service. And that I was not mistaken in so thinking was proved by the fact that the under side of the soap still bore the marks made by the sweep of the brush over the surface, and that the lather upon it was damp.

Some one had been shaving, and that quite recently, on the "Cuban Queen." It could not be Hughes, for he wore a thick, full beard. If the person who passed as "Mrs. Hughes" really was a woman she was not likely to have recourse to a razor to enhance her charms. If, on the other hand, that person was a man, who was personating a woman for purposes of disguise, a razor would be an absolute necessity among his toilet requisites.

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CHAPTER XI

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

WE often read of a novelist "taking the reader into his confidence," but at this point of my narrative I should like to reverse the process, and ask my readers to take me into theirs. Were I telling my story by word of mouth instead of by pen, I should lay a respectful hand, my dear madam, upon your arm, or hook a detaining forefinger, my dear sir, into your button-hole, and, leading you aside for a few minutes, should put the matter to you somewhat in this way: "From the fact of your following my record thus far, you are presumably interested in detective stories, and have no doubt read many narratives of the sort. You know the detectives who have been drawn — or rather created — by Edgar Allan Poe, and in more recent times by Dr. Conan Doyle and Mr. Arthur Morrison — detectives who unravel for us, link by link, in the most astounding and

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convincing manner, and by some original method of reasoning, an otherwise inexplicable mystery or crime.

"And you know too the familiar bungler who is always boasting about his astuteness, unless, as occasionally happens (but only in the pages of a detective novel, for in real life our friends are more ready to record our failures than our successes), he has some applauding Boswell — a human note of exclamation — who passes his life in ecstasies of admiring wonder at his friend's marvellous penetration. And as it is not unlikely that you have your own opinion as to what a detective should or should not do under certain circumstances, I ask you at this point of my narrative to take me into your confidence and let me put to you the following question. Suppose it had been you, and not I, who, in the hope of getting sight of James Mullen — as we will for convenience' sake call the person passing as Mrs. Hughes — had kept a watch upon the 'Cuban Queen,' as described in Chapter IX. And suppose it had been you and not I who had been in the company of Muir and Quickly that evening, and had seen Mullen come from the hulk in a boat, under

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cover of twilight, and proceed in the direction of Benfleet, whence he could take train either to London or to Southend. Would you in that case have acted as I did, and instructed Quickly to shadow him, so that you might get an opportunity of paying a surprise visit to the 'Cuban Queen' in Mullen's absence? or would you have abandoned your proposed visit to the hulk and decided to follow him yourself?"

Let me sum up briefly the arguments for and against either course as they presented themselves to me when I had so hastily to make choice. In the first place, I had to recognise that in intrusting the task to Quickly I had one or two very ugly possibilities to face. Though a sensible fellow enough for ordinary purposes, he was hardly the sort of man one would select for so delicate a piece of work as that of shadowing a suspect. He might prove himself sufficiently clever to carry it through successfully, but it was much more likely that he would fail, and it was even conceivable that he might so bungle it as to attract the attention of Mullen, and thus to frighten away the very bird for whom I was spreading a net. But what weighed with me even more than this was that

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in deputing Quickly to follow Mullen I was losing sight — at all events for a time — of the central figure of my investigations, as they then stood — of the person whom, rightly or wrongly, I suspected to be the object of my search — and this was a course which no one placed as I was could adopt without the gravest misgiving.

On the other hand, the reasons which most influenced me in deciding to intrust the task of shadower to Quickly were equally weighty. If the person who was secreted on the "Cuban Queen" were James Mullen, he was not likely, in view of the hue and cry that had been raised, and of the vigorous search which was being made, to venture far from so secure a hiding-place, and the probability was that he had gone to some station up or down the line — probably to Southend — to post some package in order that it might not bear the Canvey postmark.

Another reason was that I could not ask for an arrest merely upon suspicion, and it was quite possible that to obtain the necessary evidence I might have to keep an eye upon Mullen for some time to come. By shadowing him

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upon the present occasion, I ran the risk of being seen and recognised, which would not so much matter in the case of Quickly. Then, again, it was highly desirable I should pay my surprise visit to the "Cuban Queen" in the absence of the suspected party, and if I neglected to do so on the present occasion I might not get another opportunity.

If I could satisfy myself by a visit to the hulk that the person who had been concealed there was really a woman, I need trouble myself no further about the vessel and its occupants. But if, on the other hand, I found evidence which went to prove that the supposed Mrs. Hughes was of the male sex, I should have good cause to believe that I had indeed discovered the hiding-place of the redoubtable James Mullen.

My last reason was that at the moment when I was called upon to make my decision, I was wearing a Norfolk shooting jacket and knickerbockers. This costume, especially in the streets of London, would render mé conspicuous, and in fact would be the worst possible attire for so ticklish a job as that of shadowing a suspect,

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whereas Quickly's dress would attract no attention either in town or country.

I have asked my readers to take me into their confidence and to face with me the dilemma in which I was placed, because I am in hopes that most of them will admit that under the circumstances, and especially in view of the conspicuous dress I happened to be wearing, I acted rightly. Those who so decide will not be too hard upon me when I confess that, in allowing myself to lose sight of the person who had been in hiding on the hulk, I made, as events proved, a fatal and, but for other circumstances, an irretrievable mistake. That I am but a bungler at the best is, I fear, already only too evident, though I make bold to say that it is not often that I bungle so badly as I did on this occasion. The results of that bungle — results big with consequences to others and to myself — were twofold. The first was that Quickly never returned from the quest upon which I had despatched him, nor from that day to this has any word of him been received. He simply disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him. The second was that he was companioned in his disappear-

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ance by the person whom I had instructed him to follow. James Mullen, if James Mullen it were, did not come back to the hulk, and I had after a time to admit to myself that, so far as Canvey Island and the "Cuban Queen" were concerned, "the game was up."

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CHAPTER XII

HOW CAPTAIN SHANNON'S AUTOGRAPH CAME INTO MY POSSESSION

THE set-back I had received, so far from causing me to abandon my search for Mullen, only nerved me to fresh endeavour, though how to go to work I could not for some time determine. To threaten Hughes that I would report him to the authorities unless he made terms for himself by telling me all he knew about his mysterious visitor, was not a course which commended itself to me. I might, as a last resource, and in the event of everything else failing, be compelled to so bold a step, but for the present I felt that the wisest thing I could do would be to trace Quickly's movements after he had started to shadow the person who had come ashore from the hulk. This would, however, necessitate my leaving Canvey, and in the meantime it was of the highest importance that an eye should be kept upon the "Cuban Queen."

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It was quite within the bounds of possibility that Mullen might yet return, in which case he would probably do so by night. Hence it was at night that I kept my keenest watch upon the hulk, and in order to do this I thought it advisable to leave the inn and instal myself in a small furnished cottage, which, by an unexpected stroke of luck, I was able to rent very cheaply. But, as I could not pursue my inquiries in regard to the fate of Quickly and keep an eye at the same time upon the "Cuban Queen," I decided to send for a friend of mine, named Grant, whom I could trust implicitly.

Grant took the next train to Benfleet — the nearest station to Canvey — on receiving my telegram, and, after hearing my story, assured me of his readiness and willingness to co-operate in the search for Mullen. He promised to keep an unwinking eye upon the "Cuban Queen" while I was away, and to let me know should any suspicious stranger come upon the scene. The matter being thus satisfactorily arranged, I started off to see what I could learn about the ill-fated Quickly.

My theory was that that luckless wight had so clumsily performed the work of shadowing as to

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bring himself under the notice of the person shadowed, who would then have reason to believe that the secret of his hiding-place was known, at all events to one person. Under such circumstances Mullen would in all probability decide that, in order to insure the return of the secret to his own keeping, Quickly must be despatched to the limbo of the "dead folk" who "tell no tales;" and I felt tolerably certain that, on discovering he was being shadowed, he had led the way to some secluded spot where he or his accomplices had made an end of the shadower.

How I set to work to collect and to sift my evidence I need not here describe in detail, but will sum up briefly the result of my inquiries.

Quickly had reached the station some minutes before the arrival of any other passenger, and in accordance with my instructions had gone at once to the general waiting-room, where he remained until the train started. Some few minutes afterwards a woman carrying a bag had entered the booking-office and taken a third-class single ticket to Stepney. When the train drew up at the platform she had seated herself in an empty carriage near the centre, and Quickly

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had entered a smoking carriage at the end. When the train reached Stepney she passed through the barrier, followed at some distance by a man answering to the description of Quickly.

The woman had then bought an evening paper from a newsboy, and crossing the road slowly had turned down a by-street which led to the river. The man, after looking in a tobacconist's window for half a minute, had taken the same turning, but upon the other side of the road.

There I came to a dead stop, for not one jot of evidence as to the subsequent movements of either of the two could I discover, and, reluctant though I am to admit myself beaten, the fact could no longer be disguised that in that direction too I was checkmated.

"Another throw back, Grant," I said, when I entered the cottage at Canvey after this fresh reverse.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" inquired my friend and collaborator when he had heard my story. "Give it up, as we did the other riddles of our school-boy days?"

"Give it up! What do you take me for?

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But, hollo! For whom is that letter?" I said, pointing to an envelope which was lying on the table.

"For you. Hardy Muir brought it over. It was sent under cover to him from London."

"At last!" I said, breaking the seal. "It's from Green, the detective whom I put on to ferret out Mullen's past. I told him that if he wanted to write he was to slip the letter into an envelope addressed to Muir at the Hogarth Club in Dover Street. He 's been long enough finding anything out. Let 's hear what he has to say, now he does condescend to write. It is dated from Baxenham, near Yarby. I knew the place well years ago — used to yacht round there as a lad. Nasty coast, too, with some curious currents and very dangerous sands. Here 's his letter."

"MAX RISSLER, ESQ.,

"DEAR SIR, — When you asked me to see what I could find out about James Mullen I did not expect to turn up anything much in the way of trumps. But, sir, I always act honourable, and I have found something which I think is valuable. Sir, it is so valuable, and the reward offered for the capture of James Mullen is so big, that I cannot afford to part with the

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information to any one else. So I ask you, sir, as man to man, to let me withdraw from your service. The man that finds Mullen has got his fortune made, and what I have discovered ought to be worth twenty-five thousand pounds to me. Sir, I could have gone on taking your money as you allow for exs. and kept my mouth shut, but I want to act honourable, believing as you have always acted honourable by me. So, sir, I beg to give notice that I withdraw from your service as regards the aforesaid James Mullen, and hope you will not take offence. My exs. up to the present as I have drawn in your pay are thirty-one pound. Sir, if you will take my I O U, and I find Mullen, I will pay you back double money. But if you say you must have the money, I can get it. I hope you will take the I O U, as I want my money just now, and oblige. Sir, I am on the track. — Your obedient servant,

"JAMES BAKEWELL GREEN.

"P. S. — My address is c/o Mrs. Brand, Elm Cottage, Baxenham."

"What a rascal," said Grant, when I had finished this letter. "He ought to say he's on the make as well as on the track."

"I don't think he's a rascal," I answered. "I have always found him above board and square. If he is really on Mullen's heels the temptation

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to turn his discovery to his own account is pretty strong. Twenty-five thousand pounds, not to speak of the kudos, is n't made every day, my boy. "It 's rather like shaking an apple-tree in order that somebody else may pick up the fruit, — to do the work and then see another man go off with the money-bags. No, I think he 's acted honourably in giving me due notice that he 's going to run the show himself, and in offering to return the "exs." as he calls them. Many men would have gone on taking the coin while working on their own account."

"What are you going to do?" queried Grant.

"Run down to Baxenham to-morrow. I don't suppose I shall get any change out of Green, but I may hear something that will help me to put two and two together in regard to our late visitor on the "Cuban Queen." As Green has been working on my money and in my service I shan't feel any qualm of conscience in finding out his wonderful secret — if I can — and of making use of it if I do find it."

Next morning I was up betimes to catch an early train to town and thence to Yarby, where I arrived late in the afternoon. Baxenham is a little village on the coast, some five miles distant,

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and the shortest way there from Yarby is by a footpath across the fields.

A lovelier walk I have seldom had. The sunset was glorious, so glorious that for a while I sat like one rapt, dreaming myself back into the days of my childhood, and forgetful of everything but the beauty that lay before me.

I remembered the fair-haired little boy who day after day, as the afternoon was waning, would climb the stairs which led to a tiny garret under the roof. There was only one window in this garret, a window which faced the west and was cut in the roof itself. Looking down, one saw the red tiles running away so steeply beneath that the little boy could never glance at them without a catching of breath, and without fancying what it would be like to find oneself slipping down, down the steep descent until one reached that awful place — the world's edge, it seemed to him — where the roof ended in a sheer and terrible abyss.

But it was to see the sunset that the little boy would climb the stairs each day, and as he dreamed himself out into that sunset it seemed a part of himself — not merely a thing at which to look.

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It seemed to draw him to itself and into itself. It seemed to him as if, as he gazed, two little doors opened somewhere in his breast and his soul flew out like a white bird into the distant west. He knew that his body was still standing by the window, but he himself was away there among the purple and crimson and gold. He was walking yonder sunlit shining shore that bent round to form a bay for a golden sea. He was climbing yonder range of mountain peaks — peaks which, though built of unsubstantial cloud, were more beautiful than any show-place of the tourist's seeking — peaks upon whose shining summit the soul might stand and look out upon the infinite — peaks which might be climbed by the fancy of those whose fortune it might never be to see an Alpine height. And when the purple and crimson had faded into citron, and the citron into gray; when the gold had paled to silver and darkened to lead; and the bird had fluttered back like a frightened thing to his breast — then the little boy would creep downstairs again, dry-eyed, but sad at heart with a strange sense of loneliness and loss.

As I sat there watching the last of the sunset, that little boy seemed to look out at me with

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desolate reproachful eyes, asking what the man had to give the boy in exchange for his dreams. Then a bat flew by, so closely that I felt the cold fanning of its wings upon my face, so suddenly that I drew back with a start and awoke to real life again.

Evening was already closing in. An hour ago the setting sun had looked out over the horizon's edge and flooded the stretch of meadowland — now so gloomy and gray — with a burst of luminous gold which tipped every grass-blade and daisy-head with liquid fire. Now on the same horizon's edge the gusty night-rack was gathering. The glory and the glamour were gone, and darkness was already abroad. A wind which struck a chill to the heart moaned eerily over the meadows, and white mists blotted out bush and tree.

If I was to reach Baxenham before nightfall I had no time to lose; so, with a sigh for the vanished sunset and my vanished dreams, I rose to continue my walk.

Another field and a thickly-wooded plantation, and then, as I turned a bend where the path wound round among the trees, I found myself upon the sea-beach along which my path lay.

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In front, about a couple of miles away, I could see the church tower of Baxenham, over which red Mars burned large and lurid among a score of tiny stars that quivered near him, like arrow-heads shot wide of the mark; and low in the south the slender moon was like a finger laid to command silence on the lip of night. The beauty of the scene so possessed me that I stood still an instant with face turned seaward and bared head, and then — almost at my feet — I saw lying in the water a dark body that stirred and rocked, and stretched forth swaying arms like a creature at play. For one moment I thought it was alive, that it was some strange sea-beast come ashore, which was now seeking to regain its native element, but in the next I knew it for the body of a man, lying face downward and evidently dead.

There is horror enough in the silent and stone-cold stillness of death, but to see death put on the semblance of life, to see dead arms reach and the dead body stir and sway, as they did that night, when the incoming tide seemed to mock at death and to sport, cruel and cat-like, with its victim, is surely more horrible still.

With hands scarcely warmer than his I drew

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the dead man up upon the sands and turned him upon his back that I might see his face. It was the face of Green, the inquiry agent, and in his hand he held a small green bottle, which was lashed to his wrist by a handkerchief worked with his own initials, "J. B. G." "Suicide!" I whispered to myself as I stooped to untie the handkerchief and bend back the unresisting fingers. The bottle was short and stumpy, with a wide mouth and a glass stopper secured by a string, and was labelled "Lavender Salts." I cut the string and, drawing out the stopper, held the thing to my nose. "It *is* lavender salts," I said, "or has been, for it's light enough to be empty. No, there's something inside it still. Let's see what it is," and with that I turned the bottle mouth downward over my open palm. A slip of neatly-folded paper fell out, which I hastily opened. Four words were printed upon it in rude capitals — "By order. — Captain Shannon."

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CHAPTER XIII

I POSSESS MYSELF OF THE SECRET OF JAMES BAKEWELL GREEN

WHEN I look back upon that moment I find myself wondering at the singular effect which the discovery of the dead man's identity had upon my nerves. It turned them in a second's space from quivering and twitching strings to cords of iron. It acted upon the brain as a cold douche acts upon the body. It was as if a man had staggered heavy with drink to a pump, and after once dipping his head under the tap had come up perfectly sober. And the mental effect was equally curious. I do not think I am in the general way unsympathetic, or indifferent to the misfortunes of others, but on this occasion I found myself as coldly calculating the possible advantages and disadvantages to myself of Green's untimely end as if I had been a housewife reckoning up what she had made or lost by the sale of eggs.

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My first procedure was to secure the piece of paper which I had found in the bottle. "I may want Captain Shannon's autograph one of these days," I said to myself, "and even were it not so I should be unwise to leave this document upon the scene. If, when the body is found, it is believed that Green was drowned by misadventure there is less chance of awkward questions being asked and inconvenient inquiries made. Such inquiries might bring to light the fact that he was engaged, by my directions, in investigating Mullen's antecedents, and the matter might come to the ears of Mullen himself.

"And now another thing. I'm afraid Green's papers have been taken by the murderer, otherwise I ought to secure them. They might contain a clue to the secret to which the poor man attached such importance. Ah! I thought so; they've gone, for the pocket-book which I know he carried is missing, although his watch, chain, money, and other belongings are left. But stop a minute. When I gave Green my address I remember he took out his cigar-case, removed the cigars, and showed me that the case had a secret pocket for papers. He said that he never

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carried important papers in a pocket-book, which is the first thing a thief or a rogue who wishes to abstract a document goes for, and that he had had his taken from him twice — once by force and once by a cunning theft.

"But Mullen would not know that Green kept documents in his cigar-case, and probably would n't trouble to take it. Let me see. Yes, here it is, in the breast pocket, and I *think* I can feel papers inside the silk lining. We 'll look at them by-and-bye. Anything else in his pockets that I might require? No. Then I 'll slide the body back into the water. He 's evidently been dead many hours, and it can make no difference to him, poor fellow. That 's it. He 's just as he was when I found him. Now I 'll be off. Good night, Mr. James Bakewell Green. I won't press you for that I O U."

Still wondering at my heartlessness, I turned and walked in the direction of Yarby. But I had more important matters than my own mental attitude to consider, for the first thing which I had to ask myself was, "By whose hand did Green meet his end?" It was, of course, pos-

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sible either that he had committed suicide, or that the paper bearing the signature of "Captain Shannon" had been placed where I found it by some one who, for reasons of his own, had taken Green's life, and hoped by attributing the crime to Captain Shannon to divert suspicion from himself. But I soon decided that neither of these alternatives was worth consideration. For the motive of the crime one had not far to look. Green had, on his own showing, discovered something which might lead to Captain Shannon's arrest, and there could be no doubt that, should the fugitive get wind of this, his first step would be to rid himself of so dangerous an enemy.

From the circumstance under which I discovered the body of my unfortunate agent, I came to the conclusion that he was on board a yacht when the crime was effected.

Having often yachted off Yarby I was tolerably familiar with the coast, and knew that the place where I found the body was the very spot towards which, with every incoming tide, a strong current sets. And as matters stood it looked as if the corpse had been carried thither from the open sea. That it had not been placed

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where it was by any one on the shore — at all events since the outgoing tide — was evident from the fact that my own were the only foot-marks on the soft smooth stretch of sandy mud which led down to the water's edge. But what struck me as especially strange was that, though Green was otherwise fully dressed, he was wearing no boots. It was very unlikely that he had walked two miles along a rocky beach with unprotected feet. But if he had, for any reason, been persuaded to go upon a yacht, it was quite possible that he might take his boots off — firstly, because no yacht owner who prides himself upon the trimness of his craft and the whiteness of her decks cares to have a visitor tramping about in heavy and perhaps muddy boots; and secondly, because a landsman who is so shod would find it difficult to get a safe foothold upon the slippery decks of a small vessel. My theory was that Green had been decoyed upon a yacht under some pretext, or that he had been foolhardy enough to go on board of his own accord, perhaps in the hope of obtaining further and final evidence of Mullen's identity, or, it may be, with the idea of achieving the fugitive's arrest. Once on board,

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he had in all probability been the victim of foul play. Very likely he had been rendered insensible by a blow on the head given from behind, after which he had been carried out to sea, where he could be despatched at leisure, and without any risk of his cries being heard or the act witnessed, as might be the case on land. After that the bottle containing the paper inscribed "By order. — Captain Shannon," had been fastened to his wrist and the body cast adrift, to serve as a warning to others like him who might elect to enter the lists against the arch-assassin. But apart from the question of how Green met his end, I had to recognise that if the body were found while I was in the neighbourhood, and foul play were suspected, I, as a stranger, might be called on to give an account of myself, and might even be arrested on suspicion. Hence I decided to return to town at once, but as the crime might at any moment be discovered and an alarm raised, I thought it highly inadvisable to carry about with me anything which could be identified as the dead man's property, and that I should do well to investigate the cigar-case at once and get it out of my possession.

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Two neatly-folded sheets of paper — a diagram and a letter — were concealed in the secret pocket, and one glance at them satisfied me that they were the documents of which I was in search.

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CHAPTER XIV

ONE OF THE DOCUMENTS WHICH COST MY INQUIRY AGENT HIS LIFE

AS I could not secure a carriage to myself in the train by which I returned to town I had to defer a closer examination of the papers I had found until I had gained the seclusion of my own chambers in Buckingham Street.

The first of the documents contained in Green's cigar-case was a letter, evidently addressed to Mullen. It was dated from "Stavanger, Norway," and ran as follows: —

"JAMES, — I know all. I have never tried to spy into your affairs, but I have known for a long time that you have been engaged in some secret undertaking which I felt sure was for no good purpose. Your sudden disappearances and equally sudden reappearances and the large sums of money you have had, have always been a source of anxiety to me. That it was some political plot you were engaged in I was certain, for you were not at such pains to disguise

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your real views before me as you were before others. I remember your wild talk about society having conspired to rob you from before your birth, — of your being denied the right to bear your father's name, and of your mother's name being a dishonour to you. That your father was a villain to our mother I know, and it may be that from him you inherit your evil tendencies, and that God may not hold you morally responsible for them. But James, bad as your father must have been, he was, after all, your father, and the language you sometimes used about him has made me, who am used to your violence, shudder and turn sick.

"James, I promised our dead mother on her deathbed that I would try to be to you all that she was. She could do almost as she liked with you — could soften you and turn you from evil as no other person in the world could. There was some strange sympathy between you and her. Perhaps your knowledge of her one and only sin made you tender and chivalrous to her, just as it sometimes — God forgive me! — made me, who am so different from you and her, hard. And perhaps her memory of her one sinning made her gentle and tender to you in your many. I have had children of my own since then, James, and I think something has thawed in my heart that was cold as ice before.

"I remember that in those childish days, when you would come to our mother after some wild and wicked deed, she would take you in her arms and speak softly

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to you, and that you would become another creature and would seek to undo the evil you had done. But I used to become impatient. I wished that you should be punished, and I remember that my words would turn you to stone again and bring that hard glitter that I so hated into your eyes. Yes, and when I saw her caressing you, whom I would have had flogged, I used to feel — though she was my mother as well as yours — as if I were a stranger in the house, and could not be of the same flesh and blood as you and she.

"That is long ago, James, and we are no longer boy and girl, but man and woman. But my heart tells me that I have not kept my promise to her. She said to me when she was dying, 'Mary, I am afraid for James. He can be chivalrously generous to those who appeal to his protection; he can be heartlessly cruel to those who oppose his will. You remember how as a boy he fought like a wild cat with two lads twice his size in defence of the homeless cur that crawled to his feet when they were stoning it; and you remember that upon the same day, because his own dog snarled at him, he beat it about the head so mercilessly that we had to kill it. Mary, I am afraid for James; I am the one and only soul in this world — where, young as he is, he feels himself an outcast — who understands him. And everything depends upon his associations. He might be a good man or he might be criminal. Mary, promise me you will not be too hard with him — promise me that

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you will try to understand him, and to make allowance, and to be gentle.'

"I promised her, James, and I meant to keep my promise, but I know now that I have not done so. I did not grudge you money. I gave you more of what my father left me than I kept. But I did not try to be to you what I promised our mother to be. I know now, though I did not know it then. I have reason to know it now, for my little son Stanley looks up at me with your eyes to reproach me with it. What you once were he now is in looks and in disposition. I fear for him as your mother feared for you; and his mother knows now that the promise I made to your mother I did not keep.

"James, if you have done evil I am greatly to blame. If I had kept my promise, if I had tried to take our dead mother's place in your life, if I had aimed at being your companion, and at winning your confidence, if I had sought to keep evil influences away and to set good influences at work, you might never have formed the associations you have formed. That you have done the things they lay to your charge I cannot believe. I have seen the 'Daily Record,' and the portrait, and I know only too well, in spite of the disguise, that the James Mullen who is accused of being Captain Shannon is my half-brother James. I will never believe — nothing will make me believe — that it is really true, and that you are responsible for the inhuman crimes which you are said to have committed or to have caused to be committed. That you

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are associated with men who are capable of any wickedness is, I fear, only too true; men who, by flattering that fatal vanity of yours, which I know so well — that constitutional craving to be thought important and a power, of which I can see traces in the Manifesto which was published after the explosion — have made you their tool, and have persuaded you to accept responsibilities for actions in which you had no hand, I can readily believe. But that you, whom I have known to do such chivalrous actions, you whom I have seen empty your pockets to relieve some beggar whose woe-begone looks had appealed to your pity, could deliberately plan the murder of hundreds of inoffensive people, I cannot and never will believe.

"Until I received your letter I did not know where to write to you, and I feared to send to the old address lest my note should fall into wrong hands. You say that you have got into a scrape, and that I must help you to get out of England, as you cannot trust your associates — which I can well believe. You say, too, that you must get right away to America or Australia, and that I must lend you the steam yacht, as it would not be safe to go by any ordinary passenger steamer, all of which are being watched. You say you would not drag me into such a miserable business if you could help it, but that you dare not risk the chance of attracting the attention in which your chartering yourself a boat big enough to cross to America might result.

"Well I see the force of all this, and I will do what

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I can to help you, but only on one condition. How heartily my husband and I abhor the acts of those with whom you are associated you must know. Not even to save your life, not even to keep our connection with you from becoming known, not even to save our children from being branded throughout their lives as the relatives of a man who was accused of the blackest murder, would we move hand or foot in any matter which might even in the smallest detail further the infamous scheme in which your associates are engaged.

"But Stanley and I have talked it over, and if you will absolutely and unconditionally promise to sever yourself entirely from your associates, and never again to take part in any political plotting, we will do as you ask and bring the steam yacht to the place you mention, and remain there until you can make an opportunity to join us. We will then take you to America or Australia, or whatever country you think will be safest, will allow you a certain yearly sum which will enable you to begin life over again, and if possible to retrieve your terrible past. I tell you frankly that it is only after days of entreaty that I have got Stanley to consent to this. Had it not been that he knows my life is hanging by a thread, and that for you, my only brother, to be given up to the police by information which came through me would kill me, I believe he would have telegraphed at once to the police after receiving your letter and told them where you could be found. It is right to tell you that the terrible

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shock I received when I saw the 'Daily Record,' and knew that my half-brother was 'Captain Shannon' brought on hemorrhage of the lungs afresh, and so badly that my life was at first despaired of.

"But whether I live or die, Stanley has promised me — and you know he never goes back from his word — that if you will accept the conditions we impose he will help you to get out of the country. But he will do nothing until he has received that promise, so send us a line at once.

"And now, James, as it is quite possible that I may die before then and never see you again, I wish to make one last and perhaps dying request. You know how nobly my dear father acted when he found out about you; how, to save our mother's reputation, he gave out that you were his nephew, whom he intended to adopt as his son. James, for his sake, for my sake, for our dead mother's sake, promise me that should you be arrested you will never let our connection with you be known. It could do you no good, and it would mean that our mother's guilty secret would come out, and my innocent children would be disgraced and dishonoured throughout their lives by her shame and your guilt. If you have one spark of natural affection left you will promise me this. — Your broken-hearted sister,

"F."

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CHAPTER XV

A DOCUMENT OF IMPORTANCE

IT was a copy, and not the original, of this pitiful letter which I found in the cigar-case, as was evident from the fact that the document was in Green's handwriting, and to this I attached some importance.

As matters stood it *looked* as if Green had in some way contrived to intercept Mullen's correspondence; and it also looked as if, after making himself acquainted with the contents of Mullen's letters, Green had carefully resealed them and let them go on to the person for whom they were intended. That he must have had some reason for not retaining in his possession what might prove so valuable a piece of evidence was very clear, and after thinking the matter over I came to the following conclusion.

Although Mullen had given an address to which a letter might be sent to him by his sister, it was not likely that he himself was actually to be found at that address. On the

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contrary, it was more than probable that he had arranged some complicated and roundabout system of reforwarding correspondence, so that even if the police should find out the address to which the letter was sent, they would still have before them the difficult task of tracing the letter to the address to which it had been reforwarded, and perhaps again reforwarded, before they could come to the actual hiding-place of the fugitive, who in the meantime would get wind of what was going on and would promptly decide that it was high time for him to change his quarters. And I felt tolerably sure that his manner of making a change would be like that of certain sea-fowl who, upon the approach of an enemy, dive out of sight beneath the water, where they twist and turn and eventually come up far out of reach and range, and in any other direction than that in which they are looked for.

Hence it was possible that though Green had succeeded, as I say, either in intercepting or obtaining access to Mullen's correspondence, he might not be any nearer to discovering the criminal's actual whereabouts. But if Green merely took a copy of this letter and then let it go on to Mullen, the latter would very likely

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fall into the trap of keeping the appointment which he had made with his sister, and could then be arrested and handed over to justice. For though his sister had — lest the letter should fall into other hands than those for which it was intended — cautiously refrained from mentioning her own or her husband's name, or from giving any address except that of a foreign town, she had, woman-like, forgotten that there were not likely to be many large steam yachts belonging to an English gentleman, whose wife was in bad health, lying at the same moment off such a place as Stavanger. An experienced inquiry agent like Green would have no difficulty in learning the name of such a vessel and of its owner; and that he had taken steps to obtain the necessary information was very clear from the second document which I found in his cigar-case. Here it is —

Viscount Dungannon, shot in U. S. A. in 1881, } and { Mary Hatherwick Coyne, daughter of John Coyne, Esq., of Galway,

had son,

known as James Cross, who afterwards assumed the name of James Mullen.

—:—

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This Mary Hatherwick Coyne (d. 1880) { was / afterwards / married to } Henry Cross (d. 1886);
and had daughter,
Flora Hatherwick Cross, b. 1865;
m. in 1885 to Stanley Burgoyne, Esq.

The meaning of this document — a document which affords some interesting data to the student of heredity — evidently was that James Mullen was the illegitimate son of the famous, and also infamous, Lord Dungannon by a Miss Mary Coyne, the daughter of an Irish gentleman. The fact that Miss Coyne had been seduced and had given birth to a child had probably been kept a secret, for if Green's notes were correct she had afterwards married a Mr. Henry Cross, by whom she had a daughter, Flora (now Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne), who was therefore Mullen's half-sister, and the writer of the letter a copy of which I had found in Green's cigar-case.

How Green had contrived to find out the address to which Mullen was having his letters sent there was no evidence to show. Whether it was due to a singularly lucky fluke or to his own astuteness I could not say, and am not likely ever to know, but I quite realised and

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understood that it was possible for him to have made such a discovery. And I recognised and understood also that, after having read the letter which gave him the clue to Mullen's connection with Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne, the other facts which he had ferreted out in regard to Mullen's parentage would not be difficult to arrive at. What I could *not* understand, however, was by what means he had succeeded in intercepting Mullen's letters. If Green had been an official from Scotland Yard he would no doubt be allowed to intercept letters which might be written by or addressed to suspected persons, but that the postal authorities would permit a private inquiry agent to tamper with their mail bags was not to be entertained. That Green was staying in the same house as Mullen, and was able in that way to lay hands on the latter's correspondence, was very unlikely. Nor was it likely that my late inquiry agent had succeeded in bribing a postman, for though it may not be impossible to find dishonest postmen, the odds are very much against finding the dishonest man in the one particular office with the mails of which one wishes to tamper.

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A far more probable theory was that which had at first occurred to me, namely, that the letters had been directed to the care of a tobacconist, or, more likely still, of a hairdresser. It is matter of common knowledge that many hairdressers add to their business takings by allowing letters, on each of which a fee of one penny is charged, to be addressed to their care. Though generally implying a not very creditable connection, these letters are, as a rule, of no more criminal character than assignations with people to whom the recipient has thought it unadvisable to give his real name or address, or whose letters he is anxious should not come under the notice of his family.

If Green had intercepted the letters at a tobacconist's shop, the first thing to find out was where that tobacconist's shop was situated, and the only way to do so would be to trace the inquiry agent's recent movements. Hence I decided that I could not do better than run down to Yarby again and see what could be learned about him. But before I could do this with safety I should have to ascertain whether the body had been found, and whether sus-

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picions of foul play were entertained, as in that case it would not be advisable to visit the neighbourhood for the present.

The morning paper of the following day settled that point satisfactorily, for on opening my "Daily News" I read the following announcement: —

"SAD DEATH FROM DROWNING. — Mr. Robert Bakewell Green, a visitor from London, was accidentally drowned at Baxenham, near Yarby, yesterday. The body was discovered late last night on the beach by the Baxenham rural postman. From the fact that the unfortunate man was wearing no boots it is supposed that he had taken them off in order to pursue the pastime — so popular among Cockney visitors to the seaside — of paddling among the small pools left by the last tide. Doctor Ellis, who examined the body, is of opinion that while so engaged the deceased was overcome by faintness and was drowned in quite shallow water, the body being subsequently washed up upon the beach by the incoming tide. An inquest will be held."

Five minutes after I had read this paragraph I was on my way to catch the next train to Yarby. The reader will remember that Green had given his address as "Care of Mrs. Brand,

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Elm Cottage, Baxenham," and my first step was to interview this lady, under the pretence of being a Press representative who had come down to collect further particulars about her late lodger. From Mrs. Brand I learned among other facts that Green had been in the habit of paying frequent visits to Cotley, a seaside town some twenty miles inland.

To Cotley I according betook myself, and curiously enough the very first thing that caught my eye after leaving the station was the legend, "Letters Taken," displayed in the window of a tobacconist's shop immediately fronting the booking-office entrance. The door was closed, but as I pushed it open a bell overhead announced the arrival of a customer.

I found myself in a small shop with another room beyond, on the swing doors of which were the words, "To the Hairdressing Saloon." There was no one behind the counter, nor, so far as I could see, was there any one in the haircutting rooms. But on the counter before me lay half a dozen letters, apparently thrown there by an impatient postman who could not wait for the proprietor's return. One of them was for "Mr. Robert Bakewell Green," the

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inscription being in his own handwriting; another was addressed in a woman's hand to "Mr. Henry Jeanes," and I saw that it bore a Norwegian stamp and the Stavanger post-mark. Could "Henry Jeanes" be the name under which James Mullen was having letters sent to him?

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CHAPTER XVI

HENRY JEANES, ALIAS JAMES MULLEN

IT had been raining heavily when the train drew up at the Cotley platform, but as I did not know how far I might have to walk I had put up my umbrella when leaving the station only to put it down again as I entered the hairdresser's shop. I was holding the half-closed umbrella in my hand when my eye caught sight of the two letters. To sweep them as if by accident into the folds of the umbrella was the work of a second, and then as I turned quickly round I saw a man without a hat and wearing a white apron slip out of the door of a publichouse opposite and run hastily across the road towards the shop, wiping his mouth with his hand as he did so.

As I expected, he was the proprietor of the establishment, and after wishing me good-morning and apologising for being out of the way by explaining that he had been across the road to

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borrow a postage stamp, he proceeded to tuck me up in a white sheet preparatory to cutting my hair.

The demand for postage stamps had evidently been heavy that afternoon, and the task of affixing them had no doubt resulted in an uncomfortable dryness of the mouth, which necessitated the frequent use of liquid. Under the circumstances I considered this rather fortunate than otherwise, for the man was not unaware of his condition, and did his best to palliate it by being so obligingly communicative in regard to any question I asked him that I could, had I wished it, have acquainted myself with all that he knew about every customer who patronised his establishment.

"You have letters addressed here sometimes, don't you?" I asked, as he was brushing my hair.

"Yes, sir, we 'ave letters addressed 'ere," he made answer; "but strictly confidential, of course," whispering this in my ear with drunken gravity, and adding, after a pause, with a meaning leer, "Hand very convenient too, under certain circumstances. Is there hany little thing you can do for us in that way yourself,

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sir? If so we should be 'appy to accept your commission."

The only little thing I was minded to do for him was to kick him, and that right heavily, but repressing the unregenerate desire of the natural man, I affected to be thinking the matter over, and then replied —

"Why, yes, I think you might. My name is Smithers — Alfred John Smithers, so if any letters addressed to that name come here you 'll know they are for me, won't you?"

"Certainly," he said. "Only too 'appy to oblige a customer at hany time. Living 'ere, sir?"

"Staying for a week or so," I answered, "and I may perhaps come to live, but am not sure yet. By-the-bye, do you ever get any letters for my friend Mr. Henry Jeanes?"

"Mr. Henry Jeanes? Oh, yes, sir. And you are the *second* gentleman that 's harsked me the same question. Mr. Green 'e harsked me as well."

"Mr. James Bakewell Green?" I said. "Oh, yes; he is a friend of mine too."

"Hindeed, sir!" (This with a deprecatory cough, as if he did not think much of the late

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Mr. Green, and was inclined in consequence to reconsider the favourable opinion he had apparently formed of myself.) "Curious gentleman, Mr. Green. Never bought nothing in the shop, Mr. Green did n't. Most gentlemen as 'as their letters addressed 'ere takes a bottle of our 'air wash now and then for the good of the 'ouse; but Mr. Green 'e never 'ad as much as a stick of shaving soap at hany time. 'E was halways harsking questions too, as I told Mr. Jeanes."

"Oh," I said, beginning to see daylight in regard to the means by which Mullen had got to know that Green was making inquiries about him. "How did you come to mention the matter to Mr. Jeanes?"

"Mr. Jeanes 'e left particular word, sir, that if hanybody harsked after 'im we was to be sure and let 'im know."

"I see," I said. "And when do you expect Mr. Jeanes to call again?"

"Mr. Jeanes never calls, sir. We 'ave n't ever seen 'im. 'E sent us hinstructions that all letters wot come for 'im was to be put in a henvelope and addressed to 'im at Professor Lawrance's 'air-cutting establishment at Stanby,

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and we was to let 'im know if any one harsked after 'im."

At that moment the bell over the tobacconist's shop outside announced the entrance of a customer, and two young men pushing open the swing door of the hairdressing saloon, seated themselves to await their turn.

Under the circumstances, and especially as I had learnt all I required, I did not think it wise to ask further questions, but I had a particular reason — which the reader shall shortly hear — for wishing to possess a specimen of the handwriting in which the letters for Henry Jeanes, Esq., that were sent on to the care of Professor Lawrance's establishment at Stanby, were directed.

"Can you spare me a second in the outside shop?" I said to the hairdresser.

"With pleasure, sir," he answered, following me out. "What can I do for you?"

"Look here," I said, pushing half-a-sovereign towards him over the counter, "that 's for your trouble in letting me have my letters addressed here. And now another matter. I 've not been very well to-day, and want to see a doctor. Who 's the best man to go to?"

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"Dr. Carruthers, Devonshire 'Ouse, Grayland Road, sir. Best doctor in the town, sir," he responded.

"Would you mind writing it down for me? I've got a beastly memory."

"With pleasure, sir," he said, producing a bottle of ink, a pen, and a sheet of paper from a drawer. "That's it, sir. Much obliged, sir. I'll be very careful about the letters, and good-day, sir."

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CHAPTER XVII

ON THE HEELS OF JAMES MULLEN

I HAD already decided that my next destination must be Stanby, where it would be necessary to pay a visit to Professor Lawrance's hair-cutting establishment. But first I had to read the letters I had secured, so I turned into a small quiet-looking hotel and, having ordered dinner, asked that I might have the use of a bedroom. Then I rang for a jug of boiling water, and on its arrival I dived into the folds of my umbrella, and having brought up the two epistles which were there secreted I proceeded to hold them over the steam until the gum was so moist that it was possible to open them.

The letter for Green was, as I have said, directed to himself in his own writing. It contained nothing more important than a sheet of blank notepaper, which, as the reader will already have surmised, had evidently been sent

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as a "blind," its purpose being to afford the inquiry agent an excuse for calling at the shop where it had been delivered.

The letter addressed to Mr. Henry Jeanes — that which had attracted my attention from the fact of its bearing the postmark of the very town in Norway where I had reason to believe Mullen's sister was staying — promised to be more interesting, and it was with no little eagerness that I opened it and read as follows: —

"JAMES, — Your letter to hand. I cannot reply at present, as Stanley has gone to Bergen; but I will write you again on his return.

"F."

Though short, and unimportant as regards contents, this letter was of the highest importance in other respects. Firstly, because it was evidently from Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne, and intended for the eye of James Mullen, and so in every way confirmed the genuineness of the letter I had found in Green's cigar-case; and secondly, because it disclosed some information that I might otherwise have had much difficulty in discovering — the name under which Mullen's correspondence was being addressed to him.

It was of the highest importance — if Mullen

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was to fall into the trap which I was preparing for him — that he should have no cause to suspect his correspondence was again being tampered with; so, as it was possible that Mrs. Burgoyne might refer to this epistle in a later letter, I carefully resealed the note and handed it to the postman, whom I saw delivering letters in the street where the shop whence I had obtained it was situated.

"What 's this?" he said when he had looked at it.

"You dropped it when making your last call," I answered.

He looked surprised at first, and afterwards suspicious. "I don't remember seeing that letter when I sorted my delivery," he said; "and I ain't in the habit of dropping letters in the street — been at it too long for that. How do I know this ain't a put-up job?"

"Give it me back at once, you insolent fellow," I replied, "and I 'll do what I ought to have done at first — take it to the head office and report you to the postmaster for negligence. I go out of my way to do you a courtesy, and perhaps save you from getting into trouble for carelessness in the execution of your duty,

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and I get insulted for my pains. Give it me back, or come with me to the head office and we 'll soon put this matter right."

"I humbly ask your pardon, and hope there is no offence, sir, I am sure," he answered, with a change of manner which showed that he did not relish the threat of being reported for negligence. "I 'll see the letter 's delivered all right, and I 'm much obliged to you, sir, I am sure, and hope you won't think no more of it."

"I 'm not sure that I ought n't to take the letter to the office now," I said. "However, I don't want to get a man into trouble for an accident, but keep a civil tongue in your head another time, young man, or you 'll not get off so cheaply as you have this."

He touched his cap, and promising to profit by my advice, slipped the letter in with what I supposed were others bearing the same address ; so wishing him good-day I entered a stationer's shop and purchased a couple of envelopes and two sheets of paper. Each sheet of paper I folded and put into an envelope, which I then addressed in pencil to myself, at the post-office, Stanby. Then, after posting them, I made my way to the station and took a ticket to Stanby.

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As I had to wait some time for a train, besides changing twice at junctions, it was late when I reached that town, and I had some difficulty in finding Professor Lawrance's hair-cutting establishment, which was in a side street, and was already closed for the night. On the other side of the way, and only a few doors down, was a not very clean-looking temperance hotel and coffee palace, and here I secured a bedroom and sitting-room, from the latter of which, as it faced the street, I should be able to keep an eye upon every one who entered or left Professor Lawrance's establishment.

I then went to bed, but was up early next morning and called at the post-office, where the two envelopes which I had posted on the preceding day at Cotley were awaiting me. These I took with me to my room at the hotel, and having bought a piece of india-rubber on the way I rubbed out the pencilled name and address, after which I re-addressed the envelope in ink to Mr. Henry Jeanes, at Professor Lawrance's Hair-cutting Rooms, Stanby, imitating as closely I could the handwriting of the barber at Cotley, of whose caligraphy I had secured a specimen.

Most of my readers will already have guessed

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why I troubled to post these pencil-addressed letters to myself at Cotley, and then, after rubbing out the direction, re-addressed them in ink to Jeanes, at Professor Lawrance's establishment at Stanby, but as some may fail to do so, I had better perhaps explain myself.

If a letter for Jeanes should be forwarded on to Professor Lawrance's rooms from Cotley, that letter it would be my business, by hook or by crook, to abstract. But to do this without attracting suspicion, it would be necessary to have a dummy letter with which to replace it, and the dummy would have to bear the Cotley postmark, and be directed in a hand as much resembling the handwriting on the original letter as possible. How to arrange all this had puzzled me at first, for though I did not anticipate any difficulty in hitting upon a pretext by which to obtain a specimen of the Cotley barber's handwriting, or in imitating that handwriting when obtained, I could not see how to get over the difficulty of the postmark. A postmark is not an easy thing to forge without specially prepared tools, and until the idea occurred to me of posting at Cotley a letter addressed in pencil to myself at Stanby, and then

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rubbing out the address and re-addressing it to Jeanes, I was rather at a loss to know how to effect my purpose. However, the difficulty was now satisfactorily surmounted, and armed with my dummy letters I set out to make the acquaintance of Professor Lawrance.

He was an extremely unprepossessing, not to say villainous-looking man, and regarded me with what I could not help thinking was a suspicious eye when I entered. I submitted to be shaved and shampooed, both of which operations he performed badly, though he regaled me meanwhile with his views in regard to the winner of the Derby, and also of a prize-fight which was coming off that day.

"By-the-bye," I said, as I was drawing on my gloves, "can one have letters addressed here?"

"No," he replied shortly, "yer can't. It don't pay — on the usual terms."

"I know that," I said, "or I should n't have asked you. But I 'm willing to pay special terms."

"Is it 'orses?" he inquired gruffly.

"Yes, horses," I said, taking up the cue which he had given me; "but it's a fool's game, and I've lost a lot of money over it already."

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"Ah!" with a grin. "And yer've got a hintroduction, of course. I don't take on customers of that sort without a hintroduction. It ain't safe."

The affair was panning out beyond my reckoning, but from what had transpired I felt sure that I should be safe in assuming he was more of a betting agent than a barber, and that the wisest thing for me to do would be, by bluffing boldly, to lead him to suppose I knew all about him; so I nodded assent as airily as possible, and as if his question had been a mere matter of course.

"Who is it?" he asked point blank.

"Morrison," I replied, without a moment's hesitation — "Henry Morrison, of Doncaster. You recollect him — tall man, clean-shaven and small eyes. Wears a fawn coat and a brown billycock. He said any money I put on with you would be quite safe."

The barber nodded. "Like as not, though I don't rekerllect him from yer description. Well, wot d'yer want me to back?"

"Ah, that's what I wish *you* to tell me," I said — this time at least with absolute truthfulness, for as a matter of fact I did not know as

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much as the name of one of the horses, or what was the race which we were supposed to be discussing.

"Greased Lightning's the lay," he said. "It's a dead cert. I can get yer level money now. It'll be four to two hon to-morrow. How much are yer going to spring?"

I replied that he could put a "flimsy" on for me; and after he had entered the amount and my name — which I gave as Henry Watson — in a greasy notebook, I wished him good morning, promising to call again soon to see if there were any letters.

The rest of the day I spent for the most part in my bedroom watching the customers who patronised Professor Lawrance's saloon; nor was my vigil without result in assisting me to form an opinion as to the class of business which was there carried on. Not more than a dozen people entered the establishment during the day, and the majority of them had called neither to be shaved nor to have their hair cut. My reason for coming to this conclusion was not that I had such telescopic and microscopic eyes as to be able to detect in every case whether the caller had been under the barber's hand since his en-

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trance, but because most of Professor Lawrance's customers did not remain inside his shop more than half a minute, and because, too, I saw a letter in the hand of more than one of those who came out. And as the postman never passed the door without making a delivery, and the callers were all more or less horsey in dress and appearance, the evidence seemed to point pretty clearly to the fact that Professor Lawrance was, as I had already surmised, more of a betting agent than a barber.

I looked in next morning, ostensibly to be shaved, but in reality to try to get sight of any letters which might have come addressed to the Professor's care. That worthy forestalled me by gruffly volunteering the information that there were no letters; nor could I succeed in leading the conversation to the subject in which I was interested.

The morning after, however, I waited until I saw some one — who looked more like a customer in search of a barber than of a betting agent — enter the shop, and then followed him. He was at that moment being lathered for shaving, so after wishing the Professor good-morning, and remarking that I was in no hurry, I took a

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seat close to the mantel-shelf and pretended to read the "Daily Telegraph." It was on this mantel-shelf, as I was aware, that the box containing the letters was kept, but on looking round I saw to my dismay that the mantel-shelf had been cleared for the display of a big coarsely-coloured picture of "The Great Fight between Slade and Scroggins." The picture was labelled, "To be raffled for — the proceeds for the benefit of the widow."

Whether this was intended as a delicate way of intimating that the conflict had proved fatal to one of the conflicting parties, or whether the widow in question was the relict of the artistic genius whose brain had conceived and whose hand had drawn the picture, I am unable to say, as particulars were not given. In regard to the details of the raffle, however, the promoters of the enterprise had condescended to be more explicit, as another label announced that the price of tickets was sixpence, and that they were "to be obtained of the Professor." I was, however, more concerned at the moment in ascertaining what had become of the letters, so I scanned the room carefully, shifting meanwhile the outspread and interposed broadsheet of the "Daily

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Telegraph" — like a yachtsman setting his canvas close to the wind — so as to keep myself out of reach of the Professor's too-inquisitive glance, and switching my eyes from object to object until they discovered the missing letters placed upon a rack which hung upon the wall near the window.

"It's very dark here, or else my sight's getting bad and I shall have to take to glasses. I'm hanged if I can read this small print," I said aloud, standing up and moving towards the window, as if to get a better light. For half a minute I pretended to read, and then I leisurely shook out the newspaper to its fullest extent, in order to reverse the sheet, thus hiding myself completely from the Professor's eye.

As I did so I took the opportunity to snatch the packet of letters from the rack. It was no easy matter to shuffle through them with one hand and without attracting attention, but I accomplished the task successfully, and not without result, for the bottom letter of the packet was for Mr. Henry Jeanes, and was in the handwriting of the barber at Cotley.

The reader will remember that I had prepared two envelopes bearing the Cotley postmark, and

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addressed to Jeanes in as close an imitation of the barber's handwriting as possible. Into one of these envelopes I had that morning slipped a sheet of blank paper on which was pasted the newspaper cutting about the finding of the body of poor Green (I had a reason for doing so which will shortly transpire), and this envelope I was at that moment carrying just inside my sleeve. To abstract the original letter and replace it by the dummy was the work of a few seconds. It was well that I had come thus prepared, for in the next instant the Professor had snatched the packet from my hand, and was asking in a voice quivering with fury, "What the dickens I meant by such impudence?"

"What's the excitement?" I said, as calmly and unconsciously as possible. "I was only looking if there was one for me? There's no harm done."

"Oh, is n't there?" he said. "But there soon will be if yer get meddling 'ere again," and with one swiftly-searching and darkly-suspicious glance at my face he fell to examining the letters, and, as I could see by the movement of his lips, counting them one by one to see that none was missing. My heart, I must confess, jumped a

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bit when he came to the forgery with which I had replaced the letter I had abstracted. But the result was apparently satisfactory, for he put the packet back upon the rack without further comment and took up the discarded shaving brush to continue his task. I did not feel at the best of ease when, after the customer had paid and departed, a surly "Now then!" summoned me to the operating chair, for it was not altogether reassuring to have a razor, in the grip of such a ruffian, at one's throat. But, though the shave was accomplished with none too light a hand, and the scoundrel drew blood by the probably intentional and malicious way in which he rasped my somewhat tender skin, he did me no serious injury, and it was not long before I was back at the hotel and engaged in opening the abstracted letter.

There were two documents inside, the first of which was addressed to Jeanes in Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne's handwriting, and ran as follows: —

"JAMES, — We are glad to have your promise, and will carry out our part of the contract faithfully. We shall remain here as you direct until you telegraph the word 'Come,' when we shall start for England at once, and you can count on the yacht being at the

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place you mention within four days and ready to start again at a few hours' notice. We shall be just off the boatbuilder's yard where our little yacht is laid up.

"I do *not* see any necessity for doing as you say in regard to sending the present crew back to England under the pretence that we are not likely to be using the yacht for some time, and then, after getting the ship's appearance altered by repainting and rechristening her the name you mention, engaging another crew of Norwegians.

"This seems to me a very unnecessary precaution. Your connection with us is never likely to be discovered, unless by your own confession. However, I suppose you know best, and we will do as you say.

"F."

The other letter was on a half-sheet of notepaper, and in the handwriting of the barber at Cotley. Here it is: —

"RESPECTED SIR, — Mr. Green has not called since I last wrote you. But a person named Smithers came and asked questions. I did not like the look of him and would not tell him anything, but said I did not know any Mr. Jeanes. — Respectfully,

"JAMES DORLEY.

"P. S. — Smithers smelt of rum. He had been drinking. He was a low-looking man, and I did not like his eye."

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"I 'm pained to hear you don't like my eye, Mr. James — Mr. 'Truthful James,'" I said sarcastically as I put the letter down, glancing sideways all the same at a mirror on the wall to see if I could detect any sinister expression in my eye which could account for the unfavourable opinion Mr. James had formed of that feature. "And so you did n't tell me anything, did n't you, you precious rascal? Some day I may have an opportunity of telling *you* something, and then it is possible you may find something else to dislike about me as well as my eye. In the meantime I 'll take the liberty of detaining your letter, as it would put Mullen on the alert if I let it go on to him. His sister's letter he must have, for if I fail to set hands on him here, I can take him when he keeps his appointment with her on the steam yacht, on board which he hopes to get out of the country. So I must n't lose a moment in resealing her letter and getting it back by hook or by crook to the letter-rack whence I got it. I 'm not easy about the forgery with which I replaced it. If there had chanced to be only two or three letters waiting to be called for this morning, and I had abstracted one without replacing it with a dummy, the

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Professor would be bound to have noticed that a letter was missing. But I 'm running a risk in leaving the forged dummy there a moment longer than I can help. Mullen might call and have it given him, or it may get sent on; and though I flatter myself that the forgery is so well done that even Mullen is not likely to notice any difference in the handwriting, and though it is possible also that he will think the cutting about Green's death had been sent him by the Cotley barber, I 'd much rather that the dummy did n't fall into his hands.

" To have forged a letter from the Cotley barber would have been extremely dangerous, for I did n't then know how the rascal addressed Mullen. And to have enclosed a blank sheet of paper would at once suggest the trick which had been played. The newspaper cutting was the only thing I could think of that had the look of being a *bona fide* enclosure from the rascal at Cotley. He had to my knowledge informed Mullen that Green was inquiring about him, and what was more natural than that, seeing a notice of Green's death in the papers, he should send it on to his principal. But all the same,

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the sooner I get the dummy back into my own hands the better, for I don't think — "

At this point I broke off my meditations abruptly. I had been sitting in full view of Professor Lawrance's door, and just then I saw him put his head out, look up and down the street as if to see whether he could safely be away for a few minutes without the probability of a customer popping in, and then cross the road in the direction of the nearest publichouse.

"If I 'm to make the exchange, it 's now or never," I said, snatching up the letter from Mrs. Burgoyne which, after copying, I had put back into its envelope and resealed. In another half-minute I had crossed the road and was ascending the stairs which led to Professor Lawrance's hair-cutting establishment.

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CHAPTER XVIII

I BECOME A HAIRDRESSER'S ASSISTANT

TO replace the dummy letter by the original and to pocket the former did not take long, and as no step upon the stair announced the Professor's return I thought I might as well avail myself of the opportunity of ascertaining anything that was to be learnt about his other correspondents. With this end in view I put out my hand to take down the packet again when a voice behind me said: —

"Wot a hinterest he do take in correspondence to be sure. Be damned if he ain't at 'em again!" And as I turned round I saw the Professor in the act of closing the door, locking it, and putting the key in his pocket.

"Now then, Mr. 'Enery Watson," he said, with an ugly look upon his face, "you and me 'as got to come to a hunderstanding. You comes here very haffable like a-wanting to back a 'orse, with a hintroduction from Mr. 'Enery Morrison, o' Doncaster. Tall man, clean-shaved,

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small heyes, wore a fawn coat and a billycock 'at, did he? Ah! I knows 'im — Valker's 'is name. 'Orses!" — this with scorn too withering to be expressed by means of pen and ink — "*You* know hanythink about 'orses! Why, yer sneakin' goat, there ain't a knacker in the cats'-meat yard wot would n't put 'is 'eels in yer face if 'e 'eard yer talk about a gee-gee!"

He looked me up and down contemptuously for a moment, and then with a sudden accession of fury, and with the sneer in his voice changed to a snarl, said: —

"Yer come 'ere, do yer, a-spying and a-prying, and takes rooms over the way to keep a watch upon me and my customers. And yer want to get yer 'and on them letters there, so as to find some hevidence to lay hinformation agin me, do yer? Think I did n't know yer was a-watchin' me through the korfey palis winder? That's wot I went out for. I knew as yer'd be slippin' over 'ere direckly my back was turned. But I copped yer, yer slinkin' toad! and yer ain't got nothink to lay hinformation on; and I'll take care yer don't!"

"My good man," I replied quite coolly, "don't distress yourself unnecessarily. I know

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very well that you are carrying on illegal transactions, and I could make things uncomfortable if I chose to give the police a hint. But I 'm not a detective, and I don't concern myself one way or the other with your doings, legal or illegal. What I came here to find out is purely a private family affair, and has nothing in the world to do with you or your betting business. A man I know has disappeared, and his family are anxious to get news of him. I 've got an idea that he is in Stanby, and that he is having letters addressed to your care under an assumed name. Now look here. You 've got it in your power to spoil my game, I admit; and I 've got it in my power to give the police a hint that might be inconvenient to you. But why should you and I quarrel? Why should n't we do a little business together to our mutual benefit? I can pay for any help you give, and if you 'll work with me I 'll guarantee that your name shan't be mentioned, and to keep my mouth shut about any little business transactions of your own which you 're engaged in. Well, what is it to be? Will you accept my offer or not? You get nothing by refusing, and gain a good deal by accepting. You run this show to make

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money, and not for pleasure, I take it; and I 'm ready to put a good deal more money in your pocket than you 'd make in the general way, and not to interfere with your usual business either. I should n't have supposed it wants much thinking about."

"Wot d' yer call a good deal more money?" he asked shortly, but not without signs of coming to terms.

"Five, fifteen, or twenty pounds."

"An' who is it yer after? There 's some of my pals as I would n't give no one the bulge on, and there 's some as I don't care a crab's claw abawt."

"My man is n't one of your pals, I 'm pretty sure, though I can't tell you his name — anyhow, not for the present," I answered. "But who are the pals you won't go back on?"

"Is it George Ray?"

"No."

"'Appy 'Arry?"

"No."

"Alf Mason?"

"No."

"Bob the Skinner?"

"No."

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"Fred Wright?"

"No."

"Give us yer twenty pun' then. I'm on. I don't care the price of 'arf a pint about none of the others."

"Not so fast, my friend; you've got to earn the money before you get it. And it'll depend on yourself whether it's ten, fifteen or twenty. Now listen to me. What I want you to do is to make an excuse for me to stay in your shop, so as to get a look at the people who come for letters. You must pretend to engage me as your assistant, and fix me up in a white apron, and so on. If any one asks questions you can say I'm a young man who's come into a little money and wants to drop it in starting a hair-dressing establishment, and I've come to you to help me do it. You can tell them that you don't let me cut any of your regular customers, but that I make myself useful by stropping the razors, lathering the 'shaves,' and practising hair-cutting on odd customers and schoolboys. I could do that much, I think, without betraying myself. The sooner we begin the better. Give me a white apron, if you've got one to spare, and I'll put it on straight off. Here's five

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pounds down to start with, and I'll give you another five for every week I'm here. Is it a bargain?"

"No, it ain't. Ten pun' down, and ten pun' a week's my figger, and no less. I ain't a-going to injure my business by taking hamitoors to learn the business on my customers out of charity. Them's my terms. Yer can take 'em or leave 'em, as yer like."

In the end we compounded the matter for ten pounds down and five pounds weekly, and having arrayed myself in a white apron and a canvas coat, braided red, which the Professor tossed me from a drawer, I assumed those badges of office — the shears, shaving-brush and comb — and took my place behind the second operating chair to await customers and developments.

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CHAPTER XIX

"ARE THERE ANY LETTERS FOR HENRY JEANES, PLEASE?"

WERE it not that they have no immediate connection with my story, I should like to describe here some of the curious and amusing experiences which befell me while I was acting as assistant to a barber and betting agent. But in a narrative like the present it is perhaps best that I should confine myself to the incidents and adventures which have direct bearing upon my search for Captain Shannon.

That the Professor would betray me to his clients I did not think at all likely, as to do so would necessitate his admitting to them that he had been bribed to allow a spy, if not a detective, to enter his service under a disguise, and to have access to the correspondence of the establishment. At the same time, I did not think it advisable — at all events for the present — to take him into my confidence by telling him

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who was the object of my search. Hence I had to pursue my investigations in a more or less indirect manner, inquiring first about one of the parties for whom letters came and then about another, and so getting an opportunity to refer to Jeanes without appearing to be more curious about him than about the others. In reply to my casual question as to who Jeanes was, the Professor replied, with apparent indifference, that the party in question was young and good-looking, and that he did not suppose the correspondence which was being carried on meant any more than a foolish love-affair.

Several days went by, and the letter for Jeanes still remained uncalled for, until one afternoon the Professor asked me, as he had asked me on previous occasions, if I would keep an eye to the shop while he ran over the way to get half-a-pint. I nodded assent, and, promising that he would not be long, he disappeared down the stairs, only to return immediately afterwards for his pipe, which was lying on the mantelshelf. As he passed the rack he took the letters down and ran through them as if to see how many there were, and then giving me a look, which I took to mean that it would be no use my

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tampering with them in his absence, he again descended the stairs in search of the desired refreshment.

He had been gone about a quarter of an hour when a man, muffled up to the nose with a big "comforter," and with a soft hat pulled down so closely over his brows that little more of him was visible than a pair of blue spectacles, opened the door and, without coming in, stood coughing and panting like a consumptive on the mat outside. As he did not show any disposition to enter, I inquired what he wanted, but shaking his head, as if to indicate that he was unable to answer, he continued hacking and coughing with stooped head and bent shoulders for half a minute, and then in a hollow voice, which seemed strangely familiar to me, asked if there was a letter for Mr. Henry Jeanes.

As calmly as if his coming were a thing of the utmost indifference to me I reached for the packet of letters in order to select that which was addressed to Jeanes. To my dismay I found it gone, but repressing the exclamation of surprise which rose to my lips I turned to the waiting messenger and shook my head.

He mumbled something that sounded like

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"Thank you," and then, closing the door, toiled painfully downstairs. Scarcely had he reached the first landing before I had made what is called in music-hall parlance a "lightning change."

Tearing off my canvas coat and white apron and tossing them in a heap upon a chair, I shot into, rather than got into, my reefer jacket, and snatching at my hat was down the stairs and out in the street before my visitor was half-way to the first corner, which led to an unfrequented side street. The instant he had turned it I was after him like the wind, and, looking warily round, saw him making for a narrow lane that ran at right angles to the direction in which he was going. No sooner was he hidden by the corner than I was after him once again, but not so hurriedly as to forget to stop and peer cautiously round before exposing my own person to view. The sight which met my eyes put me, I must confess, fairly out of countenance, for there, just round the corner, with the crush hat pushed to the back of his head, the muffler thrown open and the blue spectacles in the hand which he pointed derisively at me, was none other than the Professor, literally rolling about with uncontrollable laughter.

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"Oh, my poor korf! it is so bad I ain't able to speak!" he gasped between his convulsions of merriment. "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, you 'a'porth o' pigeon's milk wot thought you could get up early enough in the mornin' to take a rise out of old Tom Lawrance! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, you feedin'-bottle fool and mug as thought yer 'd got the bulge on Downy Tom! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Come and laugh at him, sonnies, for the biggest fool and mammy's-milk Juggins and Johnny in all Stanby!"

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CHAPTER XX

HOW JAMES MULLEN AND MYSELF ALMOST MET

THE Professor was in such huge good humour at the success of his ruse that when we returned together to the hair-cutting establishment he was almost inclined to be genial, especially as I took the joke in good part, and frankly admitted that I had never been so "let through" before. So friendly was he, in fact, that he readily agreed to my proposal that I should go over the way and bring back a bottle of something to ease his cough; and after I had pledged "Downy Tom," and expressed the intention of getting up a little earlier in the morning the next time I meant trying to steal a march upon him, and "Downy Tom" had pledged me in what — in delicate allusion to recent events — he humorously termed pigeon's milk, but which was in reality the best Old Tom, we fell to discussing events almost confidentially.

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"So it *is* Jeanes as yer after — as I always suspected, though you never harsked questions about him direct, but only as if by haccident and among the others," he said, as he lit his pipe. "It 'ud have saved a lot of trouble if yer 'd told me so at fust."

"What do you mean by 'saved trouble'?" I asked.

"Why, if I 'd 'ave knowed it was Jeanes for certain, I 'd 'ave 'elped yer — for a consideration, of course. I only took yer into the shop because I meant to find out who yer *was* hafter. Jeanes ain't nothink to me; but there is some of my pals as I would n't have no 'arm come to, not for a pot o' money. And I knew if I 'ad yer there I could find out who it was yer wanted, and give 'im the tip if it was a pal. Why, I 've been a-playin' with yer all this time — a-playing hoff first one name and then another to see if it was your bloke. Then when I began to suspect it *was* Jeanes, I planned the little game I played yer ter-day — an' *did n't* yer tumble prettily! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" and off the Professor went again into a paroxysm of laughter at my expense.

It suited my purpose to humour him, so I

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joined good-humouredly in the laugh against myself; but as a matter of fact I had not been quite such a "pigeon" as the Professor supposed. Up to a certain point the scoring had been in my favour, and not in his, for I had succeeded, not only in intercepting an important letter which had been sent to his care, but also in returning that letter — after I had made myself acquainted with its contents — to the place whence I took it, so that it might reach the hand of the person to whom it was addressed.

But I knew very well that, should the Professor's suspicions be once aroused — as must have been the case after he detected me in the act of examining the letters — I should not only never again be allowed to go within the reach of the rack where he kept them, but should in all probability be refused admission to his shop. Hence I had no choice but to adopt the somewhat daring course of openly offering him a bribe to take me into his service. If he really were Mullen's confederate he would already have had cause to suspect my motives, but if, on the other hand, Mullen and the Professor had no other connection than that the former was having his letters addressed to the latter's shop, it

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was quite within the bounds of possibility that the worthy Professor would, for a consideration, be prepared to tell me all he knew about the customer in question. That the object of the leading questions he had from time to time put to me was to discover whom I was in search of, I had been well aware, although I freely admit that I had been, as I have said, "let through" in regard to the man who had called for Jeanes's letter.

When the Professor had had his laugh out I asked him quietly if he knew that the letter for Jeanes was gone.

"Do I know it's gone, yer bally fool?" he said. "Why, of course I do. Was n't it me came and called yer for it just now when I had such a bad korf; and did n't yer say there was n't any letter?"

"Yes, yes," I said, looking rather foolish; "of course I know that you came and asked for a letter, and that I told you there was n't one, but I did n't know that you knew that the letter was really gone."

"Well, considerin' as it was me took it when I came back to get my pipe, I ought ter know," he answered, and then, with a sudden change of

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manner, "Look 'ere, Watson, or whatever yer name is, I think us two can do a deal together. Yer want to get 'old of 'Enery Jeanes, don't yer?"

I nodded.

"Supposin' I knew where 'e was to be found at this very minute, wot 'ud yer give me for the hinformation?"

"Ten pounds," I answered.

He snorted.

"Can't be done under twenty, ready money. Give us yer twenty and I 'll tell yer."

"No," I said. "Take me to where Jeanes is to be found, wherever it is, and I 'll give you, not twenty, but fifty pounds, as soon as I 'm sure it is the right man. I swear it, so help me God! and I won't go back on my word."

His eyes sparkled.

"Yer a gentleman, I b'lieve," he said, "and I 'll trust yer. But yer must keep my name out of it. Now listen. When I went down the stairs to get that 'arf-pint I met Jeanes a-comin' up for 'is letters. I guessed it was 'im yer was after, and I was n't going to 'ave no harrests nor rows in my shop. Besides, if yer wanted 'im bad, I guessed yer 'd be willin' to drop money

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on it and if there was any money to be dropped I did n't see why I should n't be the one to pick it up."

Here was news, indeed! If the Professor was to be believed — and, notwithstanding my recent experience, I failed to see what motive he could have for misleading me in this instance — the man I was in search of had been in the town, and in that very house, scarcely more than two hours ago! And I had been sitting there idly, when every moment, every second, was precious!

"Go on! go on!" I said excitedly. "Tell me the rest as fast as you can. There 's not a moment to spare. I 'll see you don't lose by it."

He nodded and continued, but still in the same leisurely way.

"Well, I harsked Jeanes to wait while I fetched the letter. That 's wot I came back to get my pipe for. Yer remember I took the letters down and pretended to count 'em? Well, I sneaked it then and gave it 'im. He gave me a sovereign, and said there would n't be any more letters comin' for 'im, and 'e should n't be calling at the shop no more. Then 'e harsked

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me wot time the next train left for London, and I told 'im in a quarter of an hour, and 'e said that would n't do, as 'e 'ad n't 'ad no lunch and was starvin' 'ungry. So I told 'im there was n't another for two hours and a 'arf, and 'e said that would do capital, and where was the best place to get dinner. I told 'im the Railway Hotel, and 'e went there, 'cos I followed him to make sure. Then I whipped back and played that little game on yer just to make sure it *was* Jeanes yer wanted. And now I guess that fifty pounds is as good as mine. Jeanes 'll be at the hotel now, or if 'e 's left there we can make sure of 'im at the station when 'e catches the London express. Wot d' yer want him for? Looks a 'armless, pleasant kind of bloke, and very pleasant spoken."

"What's he like?" I said.

"Youngish, fair, and big eyes like a gal's. Wore a blue serge suit and a white straw 'at."

"Clean shaven?" I asked.

"Yes, clean shaved; or any'ow, 'e 'd no 'air on 'is face."

"That's the man," I said. "Well, come along, we'll be off to the hotel. Do you know any one there, by the-bye?"

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"I knows the chief waiter. 'E often 'as five bob on a 'orse with me."

"All right. Then you 'd better go in first and see your friend the waiter and find out where Jeanes is. If he heard anybody asking for him by name in the hall he might think something was wrong and make a bolt. Then you 'd lose your fifty pounds — which would be a pity."

The Professor assented, and we started for the Railway Hotel, he walking in front as if without any connection with me, and I some twenty paces behind. When the swing doors closed upon his bulky figure I stopped, as we had arranged, and pretended to look into a shop window until he should rejoin me.

I had been nervous and excited when we set out, but now that the crisis had come, and I was so soon to stand face to face with Henry Jeanes *alias* James Cross, *alias* James Mullen, *alias* Captain Shannon, I was as cool and collected as ever I was in my life.

The next moment the Professor came hurrying out, with a face on which dismay was plainly written.

"'E 's been there, right enough," he said, all in

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a burst, and with a horrible oath, his features working meanwhile with agitation, the genuineness of which there was no mistaking. "But instead of 'aving lunch, as 'e told me 'e should, the —— 'ad a glass of sherry and caught the 12.15 express to London, and 'e 's more than got there by now, rot 'im!"

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CHAPTER XXI

HOW I STRUCK JAMES MULLEN'S TRACK

WHETHER Jeanes, *alias* Mullen, had noticed any signs of curiosity in regard to his movements on the Professor's part, and had intentionally misinformed that worthy; whether his suspicions had been aroused by his discovering that he was being shadowed to the hotel; or whether his change of plans was entirely accidental, I had no means of knowing; but that my adversary in the game of chess I was playing had again called "check" just when I had hoped to come out with the triumphant "mate" was not to be denied. The only additional information I succeeded in eliciting from the Professor was that Jeanes had visited the shop some month or so ago and had arranged that any letters sent there for him should be kept till he came for them. He had left half-a-sovereign on account and had called four times, receiving three letters, including that which had been handed to him by the Professor.

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As for that precious rascal, I need scarcely say that I placed no reliance whatever upon what he said, and had seriously considered whether the story of his giving Jeanes the letter on the stairs, and then shadowing his customer to the hotel might not be an entire fabrication. I did not for a moment believe that he knew who Jeanes really was, for had he done so he would, I felt sure, have lost no time in securing the reward by handing the fugitive over to the police. But I quite recognised the possibility of his being in Jeanes's pay, and had seriously asked myself whether the statement that Jeanes would not be having any more letters addressed to the shop, and would not be visiting Stanby again, might not be a ruse to get me out of the way. But that the Professor's surprise and dismay when he found Jeanes gone from the hotel were genuine, no one who had witnessed them could have doubted, and as the circumstances generally tended to confirm his story, I was forced to the conclusion that he had, in this instance at all events, told the truth.

In that case I should be wasting time by remaining longer at Stanby; so after arranging

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with the Professor that if Jeanes called again, or if any other letters arrived for him, the word "News" should at once be telegraphed to an address which I gave, I packed my bag and caught the next train to town.

Mullen had called "check" at Stanby, it is true, but I was not without another move, by means of which I hoped eventually to "mate" him, and what that move was, the reader who remembers the contents of the intercepted letters will readily surmise.

In one of those letters the person to whom it was addressed was told that the steam yacht, by means of which he was to escape would be lying just off the boat-builder's yard where the little yacht was laid up. Any one who did not know from whom the letter was, or under what circumstances it had been written, would not be any the wiser for this piece of information. But to one who knew, as I did, that the writer was the wife of Mr. Stanley Burgoyne, it would not be a difficult thing to ascertain the name of any small yacht of which that gentleman was the owner, and the place where it was likely to be laid up.

Whether Mullen intended to abandon or to

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carry out the plan he had formed for making his escape by the help of his sister, I had no means of knowing. If he suspected that his letters had been intercepted, he was tolerably sure to abandon the arrangement, or at all events to change the scene of operations. But if he was unaware of the fact that I had taken up the thread which poor Green had dropped, it was possible that he might assume his secret to be safe now Green was satisfactorily disposed of, and might carry out his original plan, in which event he would walk of his own accord into the trap which I was preparing for him. In any case I should be doing right in making inquiries about Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne and their yacht, and with this end in view I purchased a copy of the current "Yachting Register."

Turning to the letter B in the list of owners, I found that Mr. Stanley Scott Burgoyne's club was the Royal London, and that he had two boats, one a big steam yacht called the "Fiona," and the other a little five-tonner named the "Odd Trick." It was no doubt in the former that Mr. and Mrs. Burgoyne had gone to Norway and by means of which Mullen was to fly the

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country, and it was probably to the latter that Mrs. Burgoyne had referred in her letter.

No one can be led to talk "shop" more readily than your enthusiastic yachtsman, and it did not require much diplomacy on my part to ascertain, by means of a visit to the Royal London Club House in Savile Row — in company with a member — that Mr. Burgoyne's little cruiser was laid up at Gravesend, in charge of a man named Gunnell.

Him I accordingly visited, under the pretext of wanting to buy a yacht, and after some conversation I remarked casually —

"By-the-bye, I think you have my friend Mr. Stanley Burgoyne's five-tonner, the 'Odd Trick,' laid up here, have n't you?"

"I did have, sir," was the reply, "but Mr. Burgoyne he telegraphed that I was to let his brother-in-law, Mr. Cross, have the boat out. That there 's the telegram wot you see slipped in behind the olm'nack."

For the second time in the course of this curious enterprise the information I was in need of seemed to come in search of me instead of my having to go in search of it. I had felt when I started out to pursue my inquiries about

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Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne, by interviewing the waterman Gunnell, that it was quite possible I might learn something of importance, but I had not expected to strike the trail red-hot, and so soon, for "Cross," as the reader may perhaps remember, was the name by which Mullen was known to his family. "Mullen" had been used only in connection with the conspiracy.

Lest the man should see by my face how important was the information he had let drop, I stooped as if to flick a splash of mud from my trousers-leg before replying.

"Ah, yes," I said at length, straightening myself and bending forward indolently to look at the telegram, which I read aloud.

"To Gunnell, Gravesend. — Get 'Odd Trick' ready and afloat. Mr. Cross will come for her. — BURGOYNE.
"Windsor Hotel, Scarborough."

"Of course," I went on, "I had quite forgotten Mr. Cross telling me, when I saw him last, that he was going to ask his brother-in-law to lend him the 'Odd Trick,' for a cruise. Whom has he got on board?"

"No one, sir. Mr. Cross was sailing her him-

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self; said he was only going as far as Sheerness, where he expected a friend to join him who would help him to handle her."

"He's a good sailor, is n't he?"

"No, sir, that's just what he is n't, and that's why I wanted him to let me go with him until his friend turned up. But, bless you, sir, he got that huffy there was n't no holdin' him. And him a very pleasant-mannered gentleman in the usual way, and free with his money too."

Our conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance of another waterman with the key of the shed where a boat that was for sale was laid up. The craft in question was a pretty little cutter, named the "Pastime," and I of course made a great pretence of inspecting her narrowly, and was careful to put the usual questions about her draught, breadth of beam, findings, and the like, which would be expected from any intending purchaser.

"Is n't she rather like the 'Odd Trick'?" I said casually, being desirous of getting a description of that vessel without appearing to be unduly inquisitive.

"Lor' bless you no, sir!" answered the hon-

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est Gunnell. "She's about the same *siz* right enough, but the 'Pastime' is cutter-rigged and the 'Odd Trick''s a yawl. Besides, the 'Pastime' is painted chocolate, and the 'Odd Trick' is white, picked out gold."

This was just the information I required, so after telling Gunnell that I would let him know my decision when I had seen another boat which was in the market, I slipped half-a-sovereign into his hand, as "conscience money," for taking up his time when I had no intention of becoming a purchaser, and bade him "Good-day, and thank you."

The result of my inquiries, though by no means unsatisfactory, had, I must confess, put me somewhat out of my reckoning. I had all along been of opinion that Mullen's hiding-place was on water, as the reader is aware, but I had not supposed he would be so rash as to trust himself on a vessel which, if his connection with the Burgoynes should reach the ears of the police, would be almost the first object of their inquiries. I could only account for his doing so by presuming that he was convinced that the secret of his relationship to Mr. and Mrs. Burgoyne — being known only to them

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and to him — could not by any means come to light, and that, taking one thing with another, he considered it safer to make use of Burgoyne's boat than to run the risk of purchasing or hiring what he wanted from a stranger. Or it might be that as no fresh outrages had occurred for some time the vigilance of the police had become somewhat relaxed, and that Mullen — knowing it to be so, and that the hue and cry had subsided — felt that his own precautions might be proportionately lessened.

Perhaps, too, the ease with which he had hitherto eluded pursuit had tended to make him careless, over-confident, and inclined to underrate the abilities of English detectives. But, whatever his reason, the fact remained that if Gunnell's story was to be believed — and I saw no cause to doubt it — Mullen had contrived to get possession of the "Odd Trick" by means of a telegram which, though purporting to come from the owner of the boat, Mr. Burgoyne, had in reality been despatched by Mullen himself.

That he was the sender of the telegram was evident from some inquiries which I afterwards made at Scarborough. These inquiries I need

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not here enter upon in detail, but I may mention that I was able by a little diplomacy to get a photograph of the original draft (it is not generally known that the first drafts of telegrams are retained for a considerable time by the postal authorities) and so became possessed of a piece of evidence which might one day prove valuable — a specimen of what was in all probability Mullen's own handwriting.

But as a matter of fact I had good cause, quite apart from the inquiries which I instituted at Scarborough, to feel satisfied that the telegram had been sent by Mullen, or by his instigation, and not by Burgoyne, as I knew by the date of the letter which Mrs. Burgoyne had sent to Mullen — the letter which I had intercepted — that her husband was in Bergen upon the very day on which the telegram from Scarborough had been despatched.

My next business I decided must be to find the present whereabouts of the "Odd Trick," but before setting out to do so I had a point of some importance to consider. Every one who has studied criminology knows that each individual criminal has certain methods which are repeated with very little variation in consecutive

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crimes. The circumstances may so vary as to cause the features of the crime to have a different aspect from the feature of any previous crime, but the methods pursued are generally the same.

The criminal classes are almost invariably creatures of habit. The fact that a certain method — be it adopted for the purpose of committing a crime, concealing a crime, or of effecting the criminal's escape — has proved successful in the past is to them the strongest possible reason for again adopting the same method. They associate that method in their thoughts with what they call their luck, and shrink from having to depart from it. Hence the detective-psychologist should be quick to get what I may — with no sinister meaning in regard to after events — be allowed to call the "hang" of the criminal's mind, and to discover the methods which, though varying circumstances may necessitate their being worked out in varying ways, are common to most of his crimes. The detective who can do this has his antagonist at a disadvantage. He is like the hunter who knows that the hare will double, or that this or that quarry will try to set the

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hounds at fault and seek to destroy the scent by taking to the water. And just as the hunter's acquaintance with the tricks of the quarry assists him to anticipate and to forestall the poor beast's efforts to escape, so the detective who has taken a criminal's measure, and discovered the methods upon which he works, can often turn the very means which are intended to effect an escape into means to effect a capture.

I need not point out to the observant reader that Mullen's one anxiety in all his movements was to cover up his traces. He could be daring and even reckless at times, as witness this fact of his having gone away in a boat, which, should his connection with Mrs. Burgoyne leak out, would, as I have already said, be the very first object of inquiry. It would seem, in fact, as if, so long as he had satisfied himself that he had left no "spoor" behind, he preferred adopting a bold course to a timid one, as for instance when he openly proclaimed the murder of Green to be the handiwork of Captain Shannon by leaving a declaration to that effect folded up in a bottle which was attached to the body.

How he had accomplished that particular crime I did not know, but I had the best of

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reasons for knowing that he had left no sign of himself behind. Carefulness in covering up his traces was indeed the key-word to his criminal code, and perhaps was the secret of the success with which he had hitherto carried out his designs. Given any fresh move on his part, and some cunning scheme for obliterating the trail he had left behind — for cutting the connecting cord between the past and the present — might be looked for as surely and inevitably as night may be looked for after day.

I had — more by luck than by subtlety — traced Mullen to the boatyard at Gravesend, but there I lost sight of him completely. He had taken the "Odd Trick" away with him the same evening, I was told, and had gone down the river, but what had become of him afterwards there was not the slightest evidence to show. To go down the river in search of him seemed the natural and only course, but I was beginning by this time to get some insight into my adversary's methods, and felt that before asking myself, "Where has Mullen gone?" I should seriously consider the question, "What method has he adopted for covering up his traces?"

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CHAPTER XXII

THE ARTFULNESS OF JAMES MULLEN

"WHAT method has Mullen adopted for covering up his traces?" I asked myself, and as I did so a passage from the letter which had been sent to him by Mrs. Burgoyne — the letter which I had fortunately intercepted — flashed into my mind.

"I do not see any necessity," she had written, "for doing as you say in regard to sending the present crew back to England under the pretence that we are not likely to be using the yacht for some time, and then, after getting the ship's appearance altered by repainting and rechristening her the name you mention, engaging another crew of Norwegians."

If Mullen had considered it necessary to take such precautions in regard to the steam yacht, he would beyond all question consider it even more necessary to his safety that a similar course should be adopted in regard to the boat which,

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until opportunity came for him to leave the country, was to carry "Cæsar and his fortunes." That boat had been described to me by Gunnell as a five-ton yawl, painted white, picked out with gold. She had by now, no doubt, been entirely metamorphosed, and before I set out to continue my search for Mullen it was of vital importance that I should know something of the appearance of the boat for which I was to look. According to the waterman Gunnell, Mullen had gone down the river when he left Gravesend that evening, and indeed it was in the highest degree unlikely that he had gone up the river towards London in a small sailing vessel. Every mile traversed in that direction would render his movements more cramped and more likely to come under observation, whereas down the river meant the open sea, with access to the entire sea-board of the country and, if necessary, of the Continent.

But should the authorities by any chance discover Mullen's connection with the Burgoynes and learn in the course of their subsequent inquiries that he had gone down the river in a five-ton yawl, painted white, belonging to Mr. Burgoyne, it would in all probability be down

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the river that they would go in search of a boat answering to that description. Mullen was not the man to omit this view of the case from his calculations, and knowing as I did the methodical way in which he always set to work to cover up his traces after every move, I felt absolutely sure that he had taken some precaution for setting possible pursuers upon the wrong tack.

The very fact that he had told Gunnell he was to call for a friend at Sheerness and had started off in that direction made me suspicious. What was to hinder him, I asked, from running back past Gravesend under cover of darkness and going up the river in search of a place where he could get the boat repainted or otherwise disguised? The more I thought of it the more certain I felt that to go in search of the "Odd Trick" before I had satisfied myself that nothing of the sort had occurred, would be to start on a fool's errand, and I decided at last to hire a small sailing-boat from a waterman and to sail down the river as Mullen had done and then to beat back past Gravesend and towards London.

This I did, working the river thoroughly and

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systematically, and missing no boatyard or other likely place for effecting such a purpose as that with which I credited Mullen. It was a wearisome task, for the inquiries had to be made with tact and caution, and it was not until I had reached Erith that I learned anything which promised to repay me for my pains. There I was told that a small yacht had recently put into a certain boat-builder's yard for repairs, but what these repairs had been my informant could not tell me. The yard in question was higher up the river, and thither I betook myself to pursue my inquiries. The man in charge was not a promising subject, and doggedly denied having executed any such job as that indicated. Mullen — if it were he — had no doubt paid him, and paid him well, to hold his tongue, and I thought none the worse of the fellow for being faithful to his promise, especially as I was able to obtain elsewhere the information I needed. The boat which had put into the yard for repairs had come by night and had left by night; but every waterside place has its loungers, and the less legitimate work your habitual lounger does himself, the more incumbent upon him does he feel it to superintend in person the work which

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is being done by other people. From some of the loungers who had witnessed the arrival of the boat which had been put in for repairs I had no difficulty in ascertaining that her hulk was painted white when she entered the yard and chocolate brown when she left, and that the time of her arrival coincided exactly with the date upon which the "Odd Trick" had left Gravesend. Nor was this all, for two different men who had seen her come in, and afterwards had watched her go out, were absolutely sure that, though she went out a cutter, she came in a yawl. This was an important difference, and would so alter the appearance of the boat that the very skipper who had been sailing her might well have been pardoned for not knowing his own craft.

I had played my cards sometimes wisely, but more often foolishly, while conducting my search for Captain Shannon, but the wisest and the luckiest deal I made throughout the business was my determination to spare no pains in ascertaining what step the fugitive had taken to cover up his tracks, before I set out to look for a five-ton yawl, painted white, picked out with gold, and bearing the name of the "Odd Trick."

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But for that determination and the discoveries which resulted from it I should in all probability have passed unnoticed the little brown cutter that I saw lying at anchor to the west of Southend as I passed by in the small steam launch which I hired for the purpose of carrying on my investigation. And had I passed that cutter unnoticed Captain Shannon would in all probability have reached America or Australia in safety, and it is more than likely that this narrative would never have been written.

To the comment "And small loss too!" which may rise — and not unreasonably — to the lips of some critics, I can only reply that I undertook my search for Captain Shannon to please myself, and in search of excitement. It is the plain story of the adventures which befell me, and not a literary study, which is here set forth, and I am quite content to have it written down as such, and nothing more. The one thing I can safely assert about it is that it is not a story dealing with the New Woman. If it has any peculiarity at all, it is that it tells of one of the few pieces of mischief which have happened in this world since the days of Eve, concerning which it may, without fear of contradiction, be

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affirmed that no woman had a hand in it; for, with the exception of the mere mention of Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne — who never once comes upon the scene in person — this is a story without a woman in it.

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CHAPTER XXIII

HOW I GOT WEDGED IN A WINDOW, AND LEFT BEHIND

IT was some half-mile or so to the west of Southend pier that the little brown cutter referred to in my last chapter was lying, and, as I had seen no other boat up or down the river which in any way corresponded with the description of the boat I was looking for, I at once decided that before extending my researches in other directions round the coast I must satisfy myself that the craft in question was not the "Odd Trick." In order to do so, and in order also that the person on board, whoever he might be, should not give me the slip, I told my man to anchor the steam launch off the pier-head, where steam launches are often to be seen lying. It did not take long to discover, by the aid of field-glasses, that there were two people on board the cutter, one of whom was evidently a paid hand and the other presumably his employer. That the latter in any way resembled the man for

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whom I was looking I could not — much as I should have liked to lay that flattering unction to my soul — find justification for thinking — at all events on the evidence of the field-glasses. And as I observed that he invariably went below if any other boat passed close to the cutter, it did not seem worth while to attract his attention, and perhaps arouse his suspicions, by attempting to come to close quarters in order to make a nearer inspection. The fact that he seemed anxious to keep out of sight was in itself curious, although no one who was not watching his movements very narrowly would have noticed it. Somewhat curious too was another circumstance which happened soon after our arrival. A small yacht, with three or four young men on board, dropped anchor about a hundred yards from the brown cutter. She had not been there long before I saw that the cutter was getting under way for a cruise; but that the cruise in question was taken chiefly as an excuse to change her quarters I had reason to suspect, for after sailing a little way out and circling once round a buoy, as if for the look of the thing, she sailed in again and brought up a quarter of a mile further west, at a spot where no other boat was lying.

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To any one who had watched this manœuvre as closely as I did it must have seemed a little strange too that the boat was sailed entirely by the man who was evidently the paid skipper, his employer neither taking the tiller nor lending a hand with the sheets. As a rule a yachtsman who yachts for the love of the thing prefers to handle his boat himself, and would not give a "thank you" for a sail in which he plays the part of passenger. Probably I should not have noticed this trifling circumstance had I not learned from Gunnell that "Mr. Cross" was no sailor. I had from the first believed that Cross's story about his picking up a friend at Sheerness who was to help him with the boat was a fabrication, and that he had in all probability run in to shore as soon as he was out of sight of Gunnell and had secured the services of one of the many watermen who are on the look-out for a job.

Anyhow the circumstances in connection with the brown cutter were sufficiently suspicious to warrant me in making sure that she was not the boat I was in search of, and I decided that a watch must be kept upon her not only by day but also by night. If Mullen were really on

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board, and had any intention of changing his quarters, the probability was that the flitting would be effected by night. I was ready to go bail for the cutter's good conduct by day, but if an eye was to be kept upon her by night it was very necessary that I should have some one to share my watch. The two men who constituted my crew I knew nothing of personally, and was not inclined to take into my confidence, so I sent a letter to Grant, who was still on guard over the "Cuban Queen" at Canvey, asking him to come to Southend by the first train next morning and to meet me at the pier-head, whither I would row out to join him in the dinghy.

He turned up true to time, and, as we had the pier-head to ourselves, we sat down where we could not be seen by any one on board the cutter, while Grant related his experiences and I mine. His were soon told, for no "Mrs. Hughes" had come back to break the monotony of existence on the "Cuban Queen," nor had anything occurred at Canvey which concerned the enterprise in which we were engaged. Then I told my story, after hearing which and my suspicions in regard to the cutter, Grant agreed

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with me that it was highly desirable an eye should be kept upon her at night as well as by day.

"I'll tell you what I think will be a good plan," he said. "I know a man who has a little boat down here which he is n't using, and I 'm sure I can arrange to get the loan of her for a week or two. Suppose I anchor her about as far away on the other side of the brown cutter as your steam launch is on this side. Then I can keep an eye upon the cutter at night, and if by any chance she tried to give us the slip, and made, as I expect she would, for the open sea, she 'd have to run almost into your arms to do it. I should of course follow and hail you to give chase as I went by, when you could soon overtake her. If, on the other hand, she goes up the river, it 'll be as easy as driving a cow into a pen, for once in she 'll have us behind her like a cork in the neck of a bottle; and even if she gets a bit of a start at first, a sailing-boat would stand no chance in a race against steam. What do you think of it?"

I replied that I thought it capital, and after we had arranged a means of communication I got into the dinghy to row back to the steam

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launch, and Grant set off again for Southend to put his plan into effect.

The very next morning, as I was cooking a haddock for breakfast, one of my men put his head into the little cabin.

"Are you expecting any one from Southend, sir?" he said. "There's a man coming out in the skiff, and I think he 's making for us. Seems in a hurry too."

I stepped outside and looked in the direction indicated, and there, sure enough, was a rowing-boat coming along at a great pace, and apparently heading directly for the steam launch. As soon as the skiff was within hailing distance its occupant looked over his shoulder, relinquished a scull, and, arching his hand to windward over his mouth, hailed us lustily.

"Ahoy there! Are you the 'Maybelle'?"

"'Maybelle' it is," I bellowed, and, once more bending to his task, the fellow was alongside of us in half a minute.

"Mr. Max Rissler?" he inquired.

"Yes, my man, I'm Mr. Rissler. What is it?" I replied.

"A letter, sir. I was to be as quick as I could about it," he said, handing me with his

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right hand a note which he had taken from the lining of his cap, and smearing his forehead with the back of his left hand, as if to hint that if he were damp outside he was dry within.

"Give him some beer," I said to my skipper, as I opened the note.

It was in Grant's writing, and was as follows: —

"Come as fast as you can to Going's Oyster Bar, in the High Street, exactly opposite the Royal Hotel. Come ready to go to town if necessary. If I 'm gone when you get to Going's, wait there till you receive wire from me.

"F. G."

As luck would have it, I was already dressed, and in a blue-serge suit, which, if somewhat shabby, would be inconspicuous anywhere. I did at first think of changing my yachting shoes — which had tan uppers with gutta-percha soles — for black boots, but it occurred to me that the shoes would be extremely convenient for shadowing, and as the tan uppers made them look like the now common brown shoe, I decided to go as I was.

"Can you wait here while one of my men and I row ashore?" I said to the messenger, tossing

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my yachting cap into an open locker and putting on the customary hard felt. "He 'll be fresher than you are, and I don't want to lose a minute."

"Yes, sir; I 'm in no hurry," the man replied.

"All right. Here 's something for yourself. Jump in, Brown. You take one oar and I 'll take the other. Make for the beach, just below the Royal Hotel. The tide is running in fast, and I shall get there quicker by boat than if you landed me at the pier and I walked. Put your back into it, and I ought to be ashore well inside a quarter of an hour."

Brown bent to with such will that, by means of our united efforts, I was at Going's Oyster Bar within twenty minutes from receiving the message. Grant was sitting where he had a full view of the hotel opposite, but could not himself be seen from outside. He had his eyes upon the hotel when I entered, and, except for one quick glance at me, never took them off again, but motioned me with his hand to the chair beside him. No one was in the shop, so, without further ado, he began his story.

"I came ashore last evening to post a letter,"

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he said, "but kept an eye on the cutter all the same, and, as it was a fine evening, strolled up and down the Esplanade before going back to turn in for the night. By-and-bye I saw a boat coming off from cutter, two men in it, and making for shore. Waited to see where they were going to land, and then hid behind bathing machine to shadow 'em. A man got out — looked as if he had reddish hair and beard — and the other one took dinghy back to cutter. Man with red beard went to station. It was past eleven, and there 'd be no up train, so I supposed he 'd be going on to Shoebury by the last down train just about due, and decided to go with him. Down train came in, but he turned as if he 'd just come by it, and went to Royal Hotel. He could n't know me, so I followed, bold as brass. Heard him ask for bed, and I did same. His room was opposite mine, and I saw him go in. I did n't go to bed all night lest I should oversleep. Peeped out at six and saw his boots outside, so he was still there evidently. Dressed and came down — boots still outside. Would n't wait for breakfast — came out — slipped in here — sent note to you — had breakfast — paid bill, but said would

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wait, as friend was to join me, and here I am. He has n't come out yet. Wonder if there 's any way out from hotel at back? Great Scott! there he is! Is that your man?"

I looked and saw a man, with reddish hair and beard, and a brown bag in his hand, leave the hotel and turn to the left in the direction of the station.

"Don't know," I said. "I can't say I recognise him; but there is something — I don't know what — about him that seems familiar. Anyhow, we 'll shadow him. He is going to the station, I expect, to catch the 10.12 up. I 'll hail that closed carriage passing by. You jump in and drive to station. You must get there before him. Book to town, and get in fore part of train. I 'll follow on behind him and get in back part. Wait in the train till he has passed your carriage at Fenchurch, and join me as I go by."

Grant's reply was to jump into the cab with the words "London and Tilbury railway. Fast as you can," and I soon had the satisfaction of seeing him whirled past the man with the red beard, and disappear round the corner which led to the station.

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"The man *may* go by the other line — the Great Eastern," I said to myself as I followed at a respectful distance, "in which case I must do the same, and shan't see Grant at the other end, which is awkward, as we have n't arranged a meeting-place. But I had n't time to think of everything, and as the 10.12 will be starting directly it *does* look as if he was going by that. Ah! he *has* turned the Tilbury line corner, so it 's all right after all."

I waited at the door a moment while the red-bearded man was taking his ticket. "Fenchurch — third single," he said briskly. "Fenchurch — third single," I repeated as soon as he had passed the barrier, and, hurrying after, was just in time to see him enter a third smoker in the centre of the train. I slipped quietly into a carriage in the rear, and in another couple of minutes we were puffing out of Southend.

Although the man I was shadowing had booked to Fenchurch Street, I thought it wise at every stoppage to keep an eye upon the passengers who left the train; and so we journeyed on, making calls at Westcliff, Leigh, Benfleet, Pitsea Laindon, East Horndon, Upminster and

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Hornchurch. At the last-named stopping-place a burly farmer, with a body like a bullock, leant half out of the window of my carriage to carry on a conversation with a friend upon the platform, and in doing so blocked my view completely.

"Will you allow me to get a paper, please?" I said, fuming with impatience at not being able to obtain a peep outside, although the train was already moving.

"So I tould 'im I 'd give 'im five pun' ten," continued the yokel leisurely, but interpolating a surly "Yer can't get one 'ere," which he threw at me over his shoulder without turning his head or attempting to withdraw from the window; "I tould 'im I 'd give 'im five pun' ten" — this to the friend who was running along the platform beside the now quickly-moving train — "and he sez, sez he, 'I 'd rather give 'im to yer.' Ha, ha, ha!"

In despair I thrust my head under his arm just in time to see the man with the red beard disappearing, brown bag and all, through the place where tickets were collected. To get out and follow him was impossible, for the yokel drew in his great shoulders almost at the same

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moment that I put my head out, and in so doing wedged me into the window like a plug in a cask, and by the time I could extricate myself the train had cleared the station and was spanking along toward London.

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CHAPTER XXIV

A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH!

HERE was a pretty kettle of fish! For the first desperate moment wild thoughts of pulling the connecting cord and stopping the train peeped in my brain like the mad faces seen at the windows of an asylum. But as the mad faces vanish at the return of the keeper, so in the next moment wiser counsels prevailed and I was considering the situation with the seriousness which the facts demanded.

And first I had to ask myself what could be the red-bearded passenger's motive for booking to London, and then suddenly changing his plans and getting out at an unimportant country station? Could it be that he was indeed James Mullen, and that he was at his old tricks of covering up his tracks?

If he had reason to believe himself shadowed from Southend, he could have done nothing wiser than to alight at Hornchurch. A detective who suspected the traveller's identity and

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had watched him enter the train at one end would in all probability telegraph to the police to meet the train at the other end and effect an arrest. By getting out at Hornchurch, Mullen would not only dodge this possible danger, but would, so to speak, force his adversary to come out into the open, for though shadowing can be carried on with small risk of detection in London, where the person so engaged is only a unit in a crowd, a shadower cannot possibly hope to escape notice in a country village.

Altogether I had to admit that, even if I had seen the red-bearded man get out at Hornchurch in time for me to follow him, I should have been uncertain how to act. Probably not more than two passengers would be likely to leave the train at such a place, and it would be comparatively easy for a man like Mullen to decide who had legitimate business in the neighbourhood and who had not. Had I been one of these passengers I should have brought myself under his direct notice, and this I was anxious to avoid, as it was quite possible that, in order to obtain evidence of his identity, circumstances might render it necessary for me to come in personal contact with him.

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So far as I knew, he was at that time unaware of my connection with Green and Quickly, whose action in constituting themselves private detectives he might reasonably suppose had been taken upon their own responsibility, and in the hope of enriching themselves by obtaining the offered reward.

Knowing, as I did, how long was Mullen's arm and how merciless his vengeance, I could not help thinking that had he been aware of my connection with the two men I have mentioned, and of my intentions towards himself, he would before this have made an attempt to bestow upon me some such unmistakable mark of his personal attention as he had bestowed upon them. That no such attempt had been made argued — so at least I tried to persuade myself — that I had been lucky enough to escape his notice and the honour of being entered upon his black list. To have got out at Hornchurch and denounced the red-bearded man as Captain Shannon, when I had no shred of actual evidence in support of my statement, and when it was more than possible he might be some one else, would not only render me ridiculous, but would mean trumping my own card by making

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known to the real Captain Shannon, as well as to the public generally, the enterprise upon which I was engaged.

All things considered, the incident which had prevented me from seeing the man I was shadowing leave the train at Hornchurch until it was too late to follow him was not an unmixed evil, for it was possible that had I been compelled to act upon the spur of the moment I might have adopted a course which I should afterwards have reason to regret.

While I had been coming to this conclusion the train had been trundling along towards the next station, and was already slowing off for a stoppage. If I were to take action I must do so immediately, and for the moment I found it difficult to decide whether it would be best to go on to London or to get out and make my way back to Hornchurch, in order to pursue inquiries about the red-bearded man and his movements.

If he were, as I suspected, James Mullen, the chances were that he had got out at Hornchurch, not because he had any business there, but to put a possible pursuer at fault. In that case he would go on to London — which was in all

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probability his destination — by a later train, or it was possible that he might seek other means of reaching town than by the line on which he had set out.

And then, all in a moment, I recollected what I ought to have recollected at first, — that Hornchurch is but a half an hour's walk from Romford, where there is a station on the Great Eastern railway.

Might it not be, I asked myself, that Mullen, knowing this, had got out at Hornchurch in order that he might walk to Romford, and thence continue his journey to town by another line? Such a manœuvre as this was just what one might expect from him, and I promptly decided to act upon the assumption that he had done so.

At Fenchurch Street I joined Grant, and told him in a few hurried words what had happened, and what were my suspicions.

"If Redbeard has got upon the Great Eastern line at Romford," I said, "he can't go farther than Liverpool Street, the terminus. He may of course 'do' us by getting out at some station immediately preceding the terminus, but that I must chance, and it's not at all unlikely

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he may come on by an express that does n't stop at the intermediate stations. Anyhow, I 'm going to cab it to Liverpool Street to watch all the Romford trains. You stay here — where you can't be seen, of course — and keep an eye upon the other trains that come in. If you see Redbeard, shadow him, and wire me to the club when you 've got any news. But remember Quickly and Green, and take care of yourself. Good-bye."

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CHAPTER XXV

JAMES MULLEN AND I MEET AT LAST

AS the cab which I had chartered rattled up the approach to the Great Eastern terminus at Liverpool Street, I had to admit to myself that the probability of my falling in again with the red-bearded man scarcely justified me in feeling so sanguine as I did.

I am not in the general way given to "presentiments," but on this occasion I felt almost childishly confident about the result of my operations. Though I told myself, over and over again, that there is nothing so hope-destroying to an active mind as compulsory inaction, and that it was only because I had something definite with which to occupy myself that I felt so hopeful, not all my philosophy could persuade me that I should fail in bringing the enterprise to a successful termination.

Curiously enough, presentiment was for once justified of her assurance, and at the expense of

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philosophy, for as the clocks were chiming eight, and evening was beginning to close in, whom should I see step out upon the platform from a Romford train but my gentleman of the red beard and brown bag.

He gave up his ticket and walked out of the station into Liverpool Street, crossed the road and went up New Broad Street and so to the Bank. Then he went into a tobacconist's, whence he emerged puffing a big cigar, and proceeded up Cheapside until he reached Foster Lane, down which he turned. Here I had to be more cautious, for on Saturday night the side streets of the City are deserted. Even in the great thoroughfares, where during the five preceding days blows have rained thick and fast, with scarce a moment's interval, upon the ringing anvils of traffic, there is a perceptible lull, but in the side streets there is absolute silence.

When I saw the man with the red beard and brown bag turn down Foster Lane, which, as every Londoner knows, is a narrow side street at the back of the General Post Office, I felt that it was indeed a happy thought which had prevented me from changing my shoes when I

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received Grant's summons in the morning. Had I been wearing my ordinary lace-ups I should have been in a dilemma, for they are not easy to remove in a hurry, and in that deserted place the echo of my following footsteps, had I been thus shod, could not have failed to reach the ear of the man I was shadowing. To have followed him boldly would have aroused his suspicions, whereas if I remained far enough behind to avoid running this risk, I incurred the greater risk of losing sight of him altogether.

But for the purposes of shadowing, nothing could be better than the gutta-percha-soled shoes which I was wearing; and by keeping well in the shadow, and only flitting from doorway to doorway at such times as I judged it safe to make a move, I hoped to keep an eye upon Redbeard unseen.

The result justified my anticipations, for when he reached the back of the General Post Office he stopped and looked hastily up and down the street, as if to make sure that he was unobserved. Not a soul was in sight, and I need scarcely say that I made of myself a very wafer, and was clinging like a postage stamp to the door against which I had squared myself.

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Evidently reassured, he put down his bag, opened it, and lifted out something that, from the stiff movement of his arms, appeared to be heavy. This he placed upon the ground, and so gingerly that I distinctly heard him sigh as he drew his hands away. Then he stood erect, puffed fiercely at his cigar until it kindled and glowed like a live coal, took it from his lips, turned the lighted end round to look at it, and stooped with it in his hand over the thing upon the ground. I saw an answering spark shine out, flicker for a moment and die away, and heard Redbeard mutter "Damnation! Hell!" through his teeth. The next instant I heard the spurt that told of the striking of a lucifer match, and saw him stoop again over the thing on the ground. A little point of light, which grew in size and brightness, shone out as I stood looking on half paralysed with horror. That he had fired the fuse of an infernal machine I had no doubt, and for one moment my limbs absolutely refused to move. I tried to call out, but gave utterance only to a silly inarticulate noise that was more like a bleat than a cry, and was formed neither by my lips nor tongue, but seemed to come from the back of

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my throat. The sound reached the ears of the man with the bag, however, for he came to an erect posture in an instant, looked quickly to right and to left, and then walked briskly away in the opposite direction.

And then the night-stillness was broken by the most terrible cry I have ever heard — a cry so terrible and unearthly that it seemed to make the blood in my veins run cold, although I knew that it was from my own lips and no other that the cry had fallen.

That cry broke the spell that bound me. Even while it was ringing in my ears I leapt out like a tiger athirst for blood, and, heedless of the hissing fuse, which burnt the faster and brighter for the wind which I made as I rushed by it, I was after him, every drop of blood in my body boiling with fury, every muscle and tendon of my fingers twitching to grip the miscreant's throat.

Had he been as fleet of foot as a greyhound he should not have escaped me then; and though he had thrown the bag away, and was now running for dear life, I was upon him before he was half-way down Noble Street. When he heard my steps he stopped and faced round

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suddenly, and as he did so I struck him with my clenched fist full under the jaw, and with all my strength. Shall I ever feel such savage joy as thrilled me then as I heard his teeth snap together like the snap of the teeth of an iron rat-trap, and felt the warm rush of his blood upon my hand? He went down like a pole-axed ox, but in the next second had staggered to his knees and thence to his feet. His hand was fumbling at a side-pocket, whence I saw the butt-end of a revolver protruding, but before he could get at it I had him by the throat again, where my blow had knocked the false red beard awry, and I promise you that my grip was none of the gentlest. Nor, for the matter of that, was my language, for — though I am by habit nice of speech and not given to oaths — words, which I have never used before nor since, bubbled up in my throat and would out, though a whole bench of listening bishops were by.

"You bloody monster!" I cried, and the words seemed to make iron of the muscles of my arm, and granite of every bone in my fist as I struck him again and again in the face with all my strength. "You hell miscreant

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and devil. By God in heaven I 'll pound the damned life out of you!"

And then the solid ground seemed to stagger and sway beneath me, and from the neighbourhood of the General Post Office came a sudden blaze of light in which I saw a tall chimney crook inward at the middle, as a leg is bent at the knee, and then snap in two like a sugar-stick. There was a low rumble, a roar like the discharge of artillery, followed by the strangest ripping, rending din as of the sudden tearing asunder of innumerable sheets of metal. I was conscious of the falling of masonry, of a choking limy dust, and then a red darkness closed in upon me with a crash, and I remember no more.

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CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

MY next recollection was that of opening my eyes to find myself lying at night in my room at Buckingham Street. I made an effort to sit up in bed, but my head had suddenly become curiously heavy — so heavy that the effort to raise it was almost too much for me, and I was glad to fall back upon the pillow, where I lay a moment feeling more faint and feeble than I had ever felt before. Then there glided gently into the room — into my bachelor room — a pleasant-looking young woman in a gray dress with white collar and cuffs.

"What 's happened, nurse?" I said, recognising at once what she was — which was more than could be said of my voice, for it had become so thin and piping that its unfamiliarity startled me.

"Oh, nothing has happened of any consequence," she replied smilingly, "except that

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you have not been very well. But you're mending now, and another day or two will see you quite yourself."

"What's been the matter with me?" I asked.

"You got a blow on the head by the fall of a chimney," she replied. "But I can't let you talk now. Mr. Grant is coming in to sleep here to-night, as I've promised to take a turn sitting up with a patient who is very ill. You can ask Mr. Grant to tell you anything you wish to know in the morning, but now you must go to sleep."

That something *had* happened, notwithstanding her assurance to the contrary, I felt sure; but what that something was I did not know, nor did I very much care, for I felt dull and silly, and more than inclined to follow her advice.

This I must in the end have done, for when next I opened my eyes it was broad daylight, and Grant was standing in his shirt sleeves before the looking-glass, shaving. My head was clearer now, and I was able to recall what had taken place up to the moment when I had lost my senses after the explosion at the General Post Office.

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"Have they got him, Grant?" I inquired.

He jumped like a "kicking" rifle.

"Good Lord! old man, how you startled me! You've made me slash myself horribly. Got whom?" he said.

"Mullen," I answered.

"Mullen? Oh, then you do know all about it? No, they have n't. But how are you feeling?"

"Like a boiled owl. How long have I been ill?"

"Three weeks. You got knocked on the head by a chimney-pot or something, and had a touch of concussion of the brain."

"Was there much damage done?"

"Damage? I believe you. The top of Cheapside pretty near blown away, and the General Post Office half wrecked."

"How did I get here?"

"In fine state, my boy — on a stretcher. They were taking you to the hospital when I came along — which I did as soon as I heard about the explosion — but I said I knew you, and told them who you were, and had you brought here instead. And a bad time you've had of it, I can tell you. But now you must n't talk any more."

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"Oh, I'm all right! Tell me, were there many people killed?"

"A good many in the Post Office, but not many outside. You see, being Saturday, most of the places were empty, except for caretakers. And now go to sleep."

"One more question only. Does any one know I was after Mullen when it happened?"

"No, they thought you were passing by chance. You see I told them who you were, but I could n't tell them what had happened, as I did n't know, and you could n't speak for yourself, so I thought I 'd better say nothing until you were well enough to tell your own story."

"And Mullen got clean away?"

"Look here, old man, this won't do, you know. The doctor said you were n't to be allowed to talk more than could be helped."

"Answer me that, then, and I 'll ask no more for the present."

"Yes, the ruffian got clean away, and no one knows to this day how he did it. Do you?"

"Yes. I saw him do it."

"The deuce you did! But there, you shall tell me all about it to-morrow. Have a drop of beef-tea and then go to bye-bye."

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Which I did.

My powers of recuperation are great, and a few days saw me comparatively well in body, though by no means easy in mind. Up to this point my search for Captain Shannon had seemed to me a somewhat public-spirited and deserving enterprise. To bring such a scoundrel to justice would be doing a service to the country and to humanity; and in the wild scene of excitement which I knew would follow the news of his arrest I liked to picture myself as receiving the thanks of the community, and in fact being regarded very much as the hero of the hour.

But while I had been lying in my room, idle in body but abnormally active in brain, the matter had presented itself to me in a very different light, and I was by no means sure that, were the facts made public, I should not be looked upon as a knave rather than as a hero. I had to ask myself seriously whether the course I had taken could be justified at all, and whether, by withholding from the authorities the suspicion I entertained about the man with the red beard, and by taking upon myself the responsibility of keeping, unaided, an eye upon his movements,

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I was not morally answerable for the lives which had been lost in the last terrible outrage he had effected.

It was quite possible that, had I gone to the authorities *before* the event and informed them of my unsupported suspicion, I should have been laughed at for my pains. But were I to come forward *after* the event and admit that before the outrage occurred, and while yet there was time to prevent it, I had suspected the man with the brown bag to be James Mullen, and yet had withheld my suspicions from the police, I might be looked upon as less of a fool than a scoundrel.

My motives for having kept silent would be open to the worst interpretation, and I should be everywhere denounced as an enemy of society whose criminal vanity had made him think himself capable of coping single-handed with the greatest artist in crime of the century, and whose yet more criminal greed and anxiety to secure the entire reward for himself had led him to withhold from the proper authorities information by means of which the capture of the arch-murderer might have been effected and the last dreadful outrage prevented.

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Knowing, as I did, how uncontrollable was the feeling of the populace in regard to the outrage, I could not disguise from myself that a man who made such a confession as I had to make, would — should he be recognised in the streets — run a very good chance of being mobbed, if not lynched.

An infuriated mob is not given to make nice distinctions, and so long as it has a scapegoat on which to wreak vengeance it does not wait to inquire too particularly into the question of the scapegoat's innocence or guilt.

Let the object of its wrath be not forthcoming, and let some evil or foolish person raise the cry that this or that luckless passer-by is the offender's relative or friend, or even that he has been seen coming from the offender's house, or is of the same nationality, and in nine cases out of ten the mob will "go" for the luckless wight *en masse*.

I have made a study of that wild beast which we call "a mob" — the one wild beast which civilisation has given us in exchange for the many she has driven away — and knowing something of the creature and its habits, I must confess that I would rather fall into the jaws of the

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wild beast of the jungle, than into the clutches of the wilder beast of the city and the slum.

One day — one not very distant day — that wild beast will turn and rend its keepers, and when once the thing has tasted human blood it will not be beaten back into its lair with its thirst for blood unglutted.

To be mobbed or lynched in a noble cause and in support of a great principle is not without its compensations, but there is no glory in being subjected to physical violence and personal insult as a scoundrel and a knave.

Worse, however, than the possibility of being mobbed was the certainty of being held up in many quarters as an object for public odium and private scorn, and the more I thought about it the less inclined did I feel to face the consequences of confessing the part which I had played in the recent tragedy. It was upon my own responsibility, I argued, that I had entered upon the enterprise, and so long as I kept within the law it was to myself only that I was responsible for the way in which that enterprise was carried on. That I had failed meant nothing more than that what had happened to those whose business and whose duty it was to have

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succeeded, had happened also to me; and, after all, I left things no worse than they were when I took the matter up.

Had it been my intention to abandon my quest I should have no choice but to acquaint New Scotland Yard with what had come to my knowledge. But, as a matter of fact, I was more than ever set on bringing the miscreant, Captain Shannon, to justice — and this not merely for the sake of reward, or because of the craving for adventure which had first urged me to the enterprise, but because of the loathing which I entertained for the monster whom I had with my own eyes seen at his hellish work. Hence I was justified, I told myself, in keeping my information to myself, and the more so for the fact that, were I to say all I knew, the particulars would no doubt be made public, and in this way reach the ears of Captain Shannon, thus defeating the very end for which I had made my confession.

Into the questions whether the decision to which I came was right or wrong, and whether the arguments, with which I sought to square my decision with my conscience and my sense of duty, were founded on self-interest and inclination rather than on reason, I will not here enter.

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When that decision was once made, I gave no further thought to the rights or wrongs of the matter, but dismissing every such consideration from my mind I concentrated all my energies upon the task of finding Captain Shannon.

And first, I decided to pay a visit to Southend to see if the little brown cutter was still there, and if not, to discover what had become of it.

As one walks down the High Street from the station, the pier lies directly in front, running out a mile and a quarter to sea on its myriad slender feet like a giant centipede. To the right are the shady shrubberies and sunny grass-crowned cliffs of New Southend, and to the left, with lips stooped to the water's edge, the Old Town straggles away seaward, a long line of picturesque irregular buildings — some cheerful red, others warm yellow, and a few cool gray — reminding one not a little of some quaint French or Belgian port blinking in the morning sunshine.

And oh! such skies! such cloud-pomp and pageantry, and, above all, such sunrises and sunsets! Such dance and sparkle of moving water when the tide is in, and, more beautiful still,

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when the tide is out, such play of light and shadow, such wonderful wealth of colour on the marshy flats — here a patch of royal purple or opalescent green, there a rose-gray or pearly-pink, with little shining pools changing from blue to silver and silver to blue with the passing of every cloud.

Southend is a pretty spot at any time, but after a month spent on a sick bed in a stuffy London side-street, the view from the pier-hill seemed to me exceptionally beautiful.

As I stood there drinking my fill of the sweet, strong, brackish air, and basking in the sunshine, I was conscious of being scrutinised quietly but very keenly by a man who was lounging near the Royal Hotel.

There was nothing in his appearance or dress — white flannel trousers and shirt, cricketing blazer and straw hat — to distinguish him from the hundreds of holiday makers in like attire who are to be seen in and about Southend during the season, but I recognised him at once, and with some alarm, as one of the cleverest officers of the detective force, and one, moreover, who had been specially told off to effect the capture of Mullen.

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In detective stories, as in pantomimes — no doubt for the same reason — the policeman is too often held up to scorn and ridicule as an incompetent bungler who is more dangerous to the hearts of susceptible servant girls than to law-breakers, and more given to deeds of prowess in connection with the contents of the pantry than in protecting the lives or properties of her Majesty's subjects. The hero of the detective story is very often a brilliant amateur, of whom the police are secretly jealous, notwithstanding the fact that whenever they have a difficult case they come, hat in hand, to seek his assistance. This, after a little light banter for the benefit of the Boswell who is to chronicle his marvellous doings — and in the course of which, by-the-bye, the fact that the police are about to arrest the wrong man is not unfrequently elicited — he condescends to give, the understanding between him and them being that he shall do the work and they take the credit.

Why the amateur detective should be the victim of a modesty which is not always characteristic of the amateur in other professions does not transpire, but the arrangement is extremely convenient to the policeman and to the author,

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the latter probably adopting it lest inquisitive readers should ask why, if there are such brilliant amateur detectives as authors would have us to believe, we never hear of them in real life.

Now I should be the last man in the world to cheapen the work of my fellow-craftsmen. I hold that there is no more unmistakable mark of a mean mind than is evinced in the desire to extol oneself at the expense of others, but none the less I must enter my protest against what I cannot but consider an unwarrantable imputation upon a very deserving body of men.

Detectives and policemen, taken as a whole, are by no means the bunglers and boobies that they are made out to be in the pantomimes and in the pages of detective stories. I do not say that they are all born geniuses in the detection of crime, for genius is no commoner among detectives than it is among bakers, bankers, clergymen, novelists, barristers, or cooks. But what I do say is that the rank and file of them are painstaking and intelligent men, who do their duty to the public conscientiously and efficiently; and to dub them all duffers, because

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now and then a detective is caught napping, is as unjust as to pronounce all clergymen fools because a silly sermon is sometimes preached from a pulpit.

I had managed to get ahead of the police in the investigation I was conducting, not because of the shining abilities with which I was endowed, for as the reader knows I had bungled matters sadly on more than one occasion, but because Fate had thrown a clue in my way at the start. But I have never underrated the acuteness and astuteness of the representatives of the Criminal Department from New Scotland Yard, and it did not greatly surprise me to find, when I commenced operations again at Southend, that though the little brown cutter was still lying off the same spot, she was being closely watched by men whom I knew to be detectives.

Whether they had discovered the relationship between Mullen and the owner of the "Odd Trick," and in following up the clue had traced the boat to Southend, or whether they were in possession of information unknown to me which led them to believe the fugitive had been hiding in the neighbourhood, I could not say; but that they were there to effect the capture of Mullen,

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should he return to the cutter, I made no doubt.

Mullen, however, was apparently too wary a bird to come back to the nest until he had satisfied himself that no net had been spread there to catch him, for that he had got wind of what was going on at Southend seemed probable from the fact that he never put in an appearance there again. Nor would it have profited me personally if he had, for in that case I could scarcely hope to forestall the police in the matter of his arrest.

Under the circumstances it would be mere waste of time to stay in Southend, and the question I had now to ask myself was, "Where, then, is he likely to be?"

As crime begets crime, so question begets question, and "Where, then, is he likely to be?" had scarcely come to the birth before it was itself in travail with, "Why not on the 'Cuban Queen'?"

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CHAPTER XXVII

I PLAY A GAME OF "BLUFF" WITH HUGHES

"WHY not on the 'Cuban Queen' indeed?" I repeated, as I called to mind the fact that it was there Mullen had lain secure when the hue and cry were at their height. It was only when the hue and cry had somewhat subsided that he had ventured forth to commence his devilry afresh; and what was more likely, now that the hue and cry had been raised once more, than that he should have crept back to his former hiding-place?

The next afternoon I was in the little cottage at Canvey again, and should have been there sooner but for the fact that I wished first to satisfy myself that my movements were not being watched by the police.

I did not intend on this occasion to waste time in trying to find out whether Hughes had any one on board with him or not, especially as I was now without Quickly's assistance. This

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was a case in which it seemed to me safer to achieve my purpose by a bold stroke than to adopt the more cautious course of beating about the bush. The thing to do would be to engage Hughes in conversation, and when he was off his guard to charge him suddenly with sheltering a fugitive from justice on board the "Cuban Queen." The cleverest rogue is apt to betray himself when a surprise is thus sprung upon him, and such a clumsy rascal as Hughes should not be difficult to deal with. I did not doubt that he would deny the impeachment with much bluster and more bad language, but by keeping a keen eye upon his face when playing my game of "bluff" I hoped to be able to come to some definite conclusion in regard to the theory I had formed concerning Mullen's whereabouts.

But I had yet to catch the hare which I felt so competent to cook, and of the two tasks the former promised to be the more difficult. Hughes, as the reader already knows, did not often leave the hulk, and as it was quite out of the question that I should seek him there, some plan for making it necessary for him to come ashore must be devised. After much brain-cudgelling I hit upon an idea which I immedi-

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ately proceeded to carry out. The oil which was burned in Hughes' cabin was taken out to him every Monday and Thursday by the attendant whose duty it was to fetch and carry for the caretakers of the hulks. I knew that it was so as the man had to pass my door on his way to the boat, and I had seen the tin can in his hand repeatedly. As a matter of fact, I was at that moment reminded of the matter, for the day was Thursday, and the man in question was just going by my gate, carrying the can in one hand and a small sack of potatoes in the other. If I did not avail myself of this opportunity I should have to wait until the following Monday before taking action, so I at once opened the door and hailed him.

"I want you to do a little commission for me," I said. "You 'll be going down to the village some time to-day, I know. Could you leave a letter to Mr. Hayes at the vicarage?"

"Yes, sir," he said civilly; "with pleasure."

"That 's right. Put that sack and the can down and come into the other room while I scribble the letter. I daresay I can find you a glass of grog in there and a cut of cold beef if you feel like having a mouthful."

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with me that it was highly desirable an eye should be kept upon her at night as well as by day.

"I'll tell you what I think will be a good plan," he said. "I know a man who has a little boat down here which he is n't using, and I 'm sure I can arrange to get the loan of her for a week or two. Suppose I anchor her about as far away on the other side of the brown cutter as your steam launch is on this side. Then I can keep an eye upon the cutter at night, and if by any chance she tried to give us the slip, and made, as I expect she would, for the open sea, she 'd have to run almost into your arms to do it. I should of course follow and hail you to give chase as I went by, when you could soon overtake her. If, on the other hand, she goes up the river, it 'll be as easy as driving a cow into a pen, for once in she 'll have us behind her like a cork in the neck of a bottle; and even if she gets a bit of a start at first, a sailing-boat would stand no chance in a race against steam. What do you think of it?"

I replied that I thought it capital, and after we had arranged a means of communication I got into the dinghy to row back to the steam

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launch, and Grant set off again for Southend to put his plan into effect.

The very next morning, as I was cooking a haddock for breakfast, one of my men put his head into the little cabin.

"Are you expecting any one from Southend, sir?" he said. "There's a man coming out in the skiff, and I think he 's making for us. Seems in a hurry too."

I stepped outside and looked in the direction indicated, and there, sure enough, was a rowing-boat coming along at a great pace, and apparently heading directly for the steam launch. As soon as the skiff was within hailing distance its occupant looked over his shoulder, relinquished a scull, and, arching his hand to windward over his mouth, hailed us lustily.

"Ahoy there! Are you the 'Maybelle'?"

"'Maybelle' it is," I bellowed, and, once more bending to his task, the fellow was alongside of us in half a minute.

"Mr. Max Rissler?" he inquired.

"Yes, my man, I'm Mr. Rissler. What is it?" I replied.

"A letter, sir. I was to be as quick as I could about it," he said, handing me with his

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right hand a note which he had taken from the lining of his cap, and smearing his forehead with the back of his left hand, as if to hint that if he were damp outside he was dry within.

"Give him some beer," I said to my skipper, as I opened the note.

It was in Grant's writing, and was as follows: —

"Come as fast as you can to Going's Oyster Bar, in the High Street, exactly opposite the Royal Hotel. Come ready to go to town if necessary. If I'm gone when you get to Going's, wait there till you receive wire from me.

"F. G."

As luck would have it, I was already dressed, and in a blue-serge suit, which, if somewhat shabby, would be inconspicuous anywhere. I did at first think of changing my yachting shoes — which had tan uppers with gutta-percha soles — for black boots, but it occurred to me that the shoes would be extremely convenient for shadowing, and as the tan uppers made them look like the now common brown shoe, I decided to go as I was.

"Can you wait here while one of my men and I row ashore?" I said to the messenger, tossing

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my yachting cap into an open locker and putting on the customary hard felt. "He 'll be fresher than you are, and I don't want to lose a minute."

"Yes, sir; I 'm in no hurry," the man replied.

"All right. Here 's something for yourself. Jump in, Brown. You take one oar and I 'll take the other. Make for the beach, just below the Royal Hotel. The tide is running in fast, and I shall get there quicker by boat than if you landed me at the pier and I walked. Put your back into it, and I ought to be ashore well inside a quarter of an hour."

Brown bent to with such will that, by means of our united efforts, I was at Going's Oyster Bar within twenty minutes from receiving the message. Grant was sitting where he had a full view of the hotel opposite, but could not himself be seen from outside. He had his eyes upon the hotel when I entered, and, except for one quick glance at me, never took them off again, but motioned me with his hand to the chair beside him. No one was in the shop, so, without further ado, he began his story.

"I came ashore last evening to post a letter,"

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he said, "but kept an eye on the cutter all the same, and, as it was a fine evening, strolled up and down the Esplanade before going back to turn in for the night. By-and-bye I saw a boat coming off from cutter, two men in it, and making for shore. Waited to see where they were going to land, and then hid behind bathing machine to shadow 'em. A man got out — looked as if he had reddish hair and beard — and the other one took dinghy back to cutter. Man with red beard went to station. It was past eleven, and there'd be no up train, so I supposed he'd be going on to Shoebury by the last down train just about due, and decided to go with him. Down train came in, but he turned as if he'd just come by it, and went to Royal Hotel. He could n't know me, so I followed, bold as brass. Heard him ask for bed, and I did same. His room was opposite mine, and I saw him go in. I did n't go to bed all night lest I should oversleep. Peeped out at six and saw his boots outside, so he was still there evidently. Dressed and came down — boots still outside. Would n't wait for breakfast — came out — slipped in here — sent note to you — had breakfast — paid bill, but said would

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wait, as friend was to join me, and here I am. He has n't come out yet. Wonder if there 's any way out from hotel at back? Great Scott! there he is! Is that your man?"

I looked and saw a man, with reddish hair and beard, and a brown bag in his hand, leave the hotel and turn to the left in the direction of the station.

"Don't know," I said. "I can't say I recognise him; but there is something — I don't know what — about him that seems familiar. Anyhow, we 'll shadow him. He is going to the station, I expect, to catch the 10.12 up. I 'll hail that closed carriage passing by. You jump in and drive to station. You must get there before him. Book to town, and get in fore part of train. I 'll follow on behind him and get in back part. Wait in the train till he has passed your carriage at Fenchurch, and join me as I go by."

Grant's reply was to jump into the cab with the words "London and Tilbury railway. Fast as you can," and I soon had the satisfaction of seeing him whirled past the man with the red beard, and disappear round the corner which led to the station.

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"The man *may* go by the other line — the Great Eastern," I said to myself as I followed at a respectful distance, "in which case I must do the same, and shan't see Grant at the other end, which is awkward, as we have n't arranged a meeting-place. But I had n't time to think of everything, and as the 10.12 will be starting directly it *does* look as if he was going by that. Ah! he *has* turned the Tilbury line corner, so it 's all right after all."

I waited at the door a moment while the red-bearded man was taking his ticket. "Fenchurch — third single," he said briskly. "Fenchurch — third single," I repeated as soon as he had passed the barrier, and, hurrying after, was just in time to see him enter a third smoker in the centre of the train. I slipped quietly into a carriage in the rear, and in another couple of minutes we were puffing out of Southend.

Although the man I was shadowing had booked to Fenchurch Street, I thought it wise at every stoppage to keep an eye upon the passengers who left the train; and so we journeyed on, making calls at Westcliff, Leigh, Benfleet, Pitsea Laindon, East Horndon, Upminster and

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Hornchurch. At the last-named stopping-place a burly farmer, with a body like a bullock, leant half out of the window of my carriage to carry on a conversation with a friend upon the platform, and in doing so blocked my view completely.

"Will you allow me to get a paper, please?" I said, fuming with impatience at not being able to obtain a peep outside, although the train was already moving.

"So I tould 'im I 'd give 'im five pun' ten," continued the yokel leisurely, but interpolating a surly "Yer can't get one 'ere," which he threw at me over his shoulder without turning his head or attempting to withdraw from the window; "I tould 'im I 'd give 'im five pun' ten" — this to the friend who was running along the platform beside the now quickly-moving train — "and he sez, sez he, 'I 'd rather give 'im to yer.' Ha, ha, ha!"

In despair I thrust my head under his arm just in time to see the man with the red beard disappearing, brown bag and all, through the place where tickets were collected. To get out and follow him was impossible, for the yokel drew in his great shoulders almost at the same

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moment that I put my head out, and in so doing wedged me into the window like a plug in a cask, and by the time I could extricate myself the train had cleared the station and was spanking along toward London.

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CHAPTER XXIV

A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH!

HERE was a pretty kettle of fish! For the first desperate moment wild thoughts of pulling the connecting cord and stopping the train peeped in my brain like the mad faces seen at the windows of an asylum. But as the mad faces vanish at the return of the keeper, so in the next moment wiser counsels prevailed and I was considering the situation with the seriousness which the facts demanded.

And first I had to ask myself what could be the red-bearded passenger's motive for booking to London, and then suddenly changing his plans and getting out at an unimportant country station? Could it be that he was indeed James Mullen, and that he was at his old tricks of covering up his tracks?

If he had reason to believe himself shadowed from Southend, he could have done nothing wiser than to alight at Hornchurch. A detective who suspected the traveller's identity and

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had watched him enter the train at one end would in all probability telegraph to the police to meet the train at the other end and effect an arrest. By getting out at Hornchurch, Mullen would not only dodge this possible danger, but would, so to speak, force his adversary to come out into the open, for though shadowing can be carried on with small risk of detection in London, where the person so engaged is only a unit in a crowd, a shadower cannot possibly hope to escape notice in a country village.

Altogether I had to admit that, even if I had seen the red-bearded man get out at Hornchurch in time for me to follow him, I should have been uncertain how to act. Probably not more than two passengers would be likely to leave the train at such a place, and it would be comparatively easy for a man like Mullen to decide who had legitimate business in the neighbourhood and who had not. Had I been one of these passengers I should have brought myself under his direct notice, and this I was anxious to avoid, as it was quite possible that, in order to obtain evidence of his identity, circumstances might render it necessary for me to come in personal contact with him.

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So far as I knew, he was at that time unaware of my connection with Green and Quickly, whose action in constituting themselves private detectives he might reasonably suppose had been taken upon their own responsibility, and in the hope of enriching themselves by obtaining the offered reward.

Knowing, as I did, how long was Mullen's arm and how merciless his vengeance, I could not help thinking that had he been aware of my connection with the two men I have mentioned, and of my intentions towards himself, he would before this have made an attempt to bestow upon me some such unmistakable mark of his personal attention as he had bestowed upon them. That no such attempt had been made argued — so at least I tried to persuade myself — that I had been lucky enough to escape his notice and the honour of being entered upon his black list. To have got out at Hornchurch and denounced the red-bearded man as Captain Shannon, when I had no shred of actual evidence in support of my statement, and when it was more than possible he might be some one else, would not only render me ridiculous, but would mean trumping my own card by making

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known to the real Captain Shannon, as well as to the public generally, the enterprise upon which I was engaged.

All things considered, the incident which had prevented me from seeing the man I was shadowing leave the train at Hornchurch until it was too late to follow him was not an unmixed evil, for it was possible that had I been compelled to act upon the spur of the moment I might have adopted a course which I should afterwards have reason to regret.

While I had been coming to this conclusion the train had been trundling along towards the next station, and was already slowing off for a stoppage. If I were to take action I must do so immediately, and for the moment I found it difficult to decide whether it would be best to go on to London or to get out and make my way back to Hornchurch, in order to pursue inquiries about the red-bearded man and his movements.

If he were, as I suspected, James Mullen, the chances were that he had got out at Hornchurch, not because he had any business there, but to put a possible pursuer at fault. In that case he would go on to London — which was in all

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probability his destination — by a later train, or it was possible that he might seek other means of reaching town than by the line on which he had set out.

And then, all in a moment, I recollected what I ought to have recollected at first, — that Hornchurch is but a half an hour's walk from Romford, where there is a station on the Great Eastern railway.

Might it not be, I asked myself, that Mullen, knowing this, had got out at Hornchurch in order that he might walk to Romford, and thence continue his journey to town by another line? Such a manœuvre as this was just what one might expect from him, and I promptly decided to act upon the assumption that he had done so.

At Fenchurch Street I joined Grant, and told him in a few hurried words what had happened, and what were my suspicions.

"If Redbeard has got upon the Great Eastern line at Romford," I said, "he can't go farther than Liverpool Street, the terminus. He may of course 'do' us by getting out at some station immediately preceding the terminus, but that I must chance, and it's not at all unlikely

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he may come on by an express that does n't stop at the intermediate stations. Anyhow, I 'm going to cab it to Liverpool Street to watch all the Romford trains. You stay here — where you can't be seen, of course — and keep an eye upon the other trains that come in. If you see Redbeard, shadow him, and wire me to the club when you 've got any news. But remember Quickly and Green, and take care of yourself. Good-bye."

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CHAPTER XXV

JAMES MULLEN AND I MEET AT LAST

AS the cab which I had chartered rattled up the approach to the Great Eastern terminus at Liverpool Street, I had to admit to myself that the probability of my falling in again with the red-bearded man scarcely justified me in feeling so sanguine as I did.

I am not in the general way given to "presentiments," but on this occasion I felt almost childishly confident about the result of my operations. Though I told myself, over and over again, that there is nothing so hope-destroying to an active mind as compulsory inaction, and that it was only because I had something definite with which to occupy myself that I felt so hopeful, not all my philosophy could persuade me that I should fail in bringing the enterprise to a successful termination.

Curiously enough, presentiment was for once justified of her assurance, and at the expense of

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philosophy, for as the clocks were chiming eight, and evening was beginning to close in, whom should I see step out upon the platform from a Romford train but my gentleman of the red beard and brown bag.

He gave up his ticket and walked out of the station into Liverpool Street, crossed the road and went up New Broad Street and so to the Bank. Then he went into a tobacconist's, whence he emerged puffing a big cigar, and proceeded up Cheapside until he reached Foster Lane, down which he turned. Here I had to be more cautious, for on Saturday night the side streets of the City are deserted. Even in the great thoroughfares, where during the five preceding days blows have rained thick and fast, with scarce a moment's interval, upon the ringing anvils of traffic, there is a perceptible lull, but in the side streets there is absolute silence.

When I saw the man with the red beard and brown bag turn down Foster Lane, which, as every Londoner knows, is a narrow side street at the back of the General Post Office, I felt that it was indeed a happy thought which had prevented me from changing my shoes when I

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received Grant's summons in the morning. Had I been wearing my ordinary lace-ups I should have been in a dilemma, for they are not easy to remove in a hurry, and in that deserted place the echo of my following footsteps, had I been thus shod, could not have failed to reach the ear of the man I was shadowing. To have followed him boldly would have aroused his suspicions, whereas if I remained far enough behind to avoid running this risk, I incurred the greater risk of losing sight of him altogether.

But for the purposes of shadowing, nothing could be better than the gutta-percha-soled shoes which I was wearing; and by keeping well in the shadow, and only flitting from doorway to doorway at such times as I judged it safe to make a move, I hoped to keep an eye upon Redbeard unseen.

The result justified my anticipations, for when he reached the back of the General Post Office he stopped and looked hastily up and down the street, as if to make sure that he was unobserved. Not a soul was in sight, and I need scarcely say that I made of myself a very wafer, and was clinging like a postage stamp to the door against which I had squared myself.

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Evidently reassured, he put down his bag, opened it, and lifted out something that, from the stiff movement of his arms, appeared to be heavy. This he placed upon the ground, and so gingerly that I distinctly heard him sigh as he drew his hands away. Then he stood erect, puffed fiercely at his cigar until it kindled and glowed like a live coal, took it from his lips, turned the lighted end round to look at it, and stooped with it in his hand over the thing upon the ground. I saw an answering spark shine out, flicker for a moment and die away, and heard Redbeard mutter "Damnation! Hell!" through his teeth. The next instant I heard the spurt that told of the striking of a lucifer match, and saw him stoop again over the thing on the ground. A little point of light, which grew in size and brightness, shone out as I stood looking on half paralysed with horror. That he had fired the fuse of an infernal machine I had no doubt, and for one moment my limbs absolutely refused to move. I tried to call out, but gave utterance only to a silly inarticulate noise that was more like a bleat than a cry, and was formed neither by my lips nor tongue, but seemed to come from the back of

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my throat. The sound reached the ears of the man with the bag, however, for he came to an erect posture in an instant, looked quickly to right and to left, and then walked briskly away in the opposite direction.

And then the night-stillness was broken by the most terrible cry I have ever heard — a cry so terrible and unearthly that it seemed to make the blood in my veins run cold, although I knew that it was from my own lips and no other that the cry had fallen.

That cry broke the spell that bound me. Even while it was ringing in my ears I leapt out like a tiger athirst for blood, and, heedless of the hissing fuse, which burnt the faster and brighter for the wind which I made as I rushed by it, I was after him, every drop of blood in my body boiling with fury, every muscle and tendon of my fingers twitching to grip the miscreant's throat.

Had he been as fleet of foot as a greyhound he should not have escaped me then; and though he had thrown the bag away, and was now running for dear life, I was upon him before he was half-way down Noble Street. When he heard my steps he stopped and faced round

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suddenly, and as he did so I struck him with my clenched fist full under the jaw, and with all my strength. Shall I ever feel such savage joy as thrilled me then as I heard his teeth snap together like the snap of the teeth of an iron rat-trap, and felt the warm rush of his blood upon my hand? He went down like a pole-axed ox, but in the next second had staggered to his knees and thence to his feet. His hand was fumbling at a side-pocket, whence I saw the butt-end of a revolver protruding, but before he could get at it I had him by the throat again, where my blow had knocked the false red beard awry, and I promise you that my grip was none of the gentlest. Nor, for the matter of that, was my language, for — though I am by habit nice of speech and not given to oaths — words, which I have never used before nor since, bubbled up in my throat and would out, though a whole bench of listening bishops were by.

"You bloody monster!" I cried, and the words seemed to make iron of the muscles of my arm, and granite of every bone in my fist as I struck him again and again in the face with all my strength. "You hell miscreant

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and devil. By God in heaven I 'll pound the damned life out of you ! "

And then the solid ground seemed to stagger and sway beneath me, and from the neighbourhood of the General Post Office came a sudden blaze of light in which I saw a tall chimney crook inward at the middle, as a leg is bent at the knee, and then snap in two like a sugar-stick. There was a low rumble, a roar like the discharge of artillery, followed by the strangest ripping, rending din as of the sudden tearing asunder of innumerable sheets of metal. I was conscious of the falling of masonry, of a choking limy dust, and then a red darkness closed in upon me with a crash, and I remember no more.

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CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

MY next recollection was that of opening my eyes to find myself lying at night in my room at Buckingham Street. I made an effort to sit up in bed, but my head had suddenly become curiously heavy — so heavy that the effort to raise it was almost too much for me, and I was glad to fall back upon the pillow, where I lay a moment feeling more faint and feeble than I had ever felt before. Then there glided gently into the room — into my bachelor room — a pleasant-looking young woman in a gray dress with white collar and cuffs.

"What 's happened, nurse?" I said, recognising at once what she was — which was more than could be said of my voice, for it had become so thin and piping that its unfamiliarity startled me.

"Oh, nothing has happened of any consequence," she replied smilingly, "except that

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you have not been very well. But you're mending now, and another day or two will see you quite yourself."

"What's been the matter with me?" I asked.

"You got a blow on the head by the fall of a chimney," she replied. "But I can't let you talk now. Mr. Grant is coming in to sleep here to-night, as I've promised to take a turn sitting up with a patient who is very ill. You can ask Mr. Grant to tell you anything you wish to know in the morning, but now you must go to sleep."

That something *had* happened, notwithstanding her assurance to the contrary, I felt sure; but what that something was I did not know, nor did I very much care, for I felt dull and silly, and more than inclined to follow her advice.

This I must in the end have done, for when next I opened my eyes it was broad daylight, and Grant was standing in his shirt sleeves before the looking-glass, shaving. My head was clearer now, and I was able to recall what had taken place up to the moment when I had lost my senses after the explosion at the General Post Office.

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"Have they got him, Grant?" I inquired.

He jumped like a "kicking" rifle.

"Good Lord! old man, how you startled me! You've made me slash myself horribly. Got whom?" he said.

"Mullen," I answered.

"Mullen? Oh, then you do know all about it? No, they have n't. But how are you feeling?"

"Like a boiled owl. How long have I been ill?"

"Three weeks. You got knocked on the head by a chimney-pot or something, and had a touch of concussion of the brain."

"Was there much damage done?"

"Damage? I believe you. The top of Cheapside pretty near blown away, and the General Post Office half wrecked."

"How did I get here?"

"In fine state, my boy — on a stretcher. They were taking you to the hospital when I came along — which I did as soon as I heard about the explosion — but I said I knew you, and told them who you were, and had you brought here instead. And a bad time you've had of it, I can tell you. But now you must n't talk any more."

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"Oh, I'm all right! Tell me, were there many people killed?"

"A good many in the Post Office, but not many outside. You see, being Saturday, most of the places were empty, except for caretakers. And now go to sleep."

"One more question only. Does any one know I was after Mullen when it happened?"

"No, they thought you were passing by chance. You see I told them who you were, but I could n't tell them what had happened, as I did n't know, and you could n't speak for yourself, so I thought I 'd better say nothing until you were well enough to tell your own story."

"And Mullen got clean away?"

"Look here, old man, this won't do, you know. The doctor said you were n't to be allowed to talk more than could be helped."

"Answer me that, then, and I 'll ask no more for the present."

"Yes, the ruffian got clean away, and no one knows to this day how he did it. Do you?"

"Yes. I saw him do it."

"The deuce you did! But there, you shall tell me all about it to-morrow. Have a drop of beef-tea and then go to bye-bye."

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Which I did.

My powers of recuperation are great, and a few days saw me comparatively well in body, though by no means easy in mind. Up to this point my search for Captain Shannon had seemed to me a somewhat public-spirited and deserving enterprise. To bring such a scoundrel to justice would be doing a service to the country and to humanity; and in the wild scene of excitement which I knew would follow the news of his arrest I liked to picture myself as receiving the thanks of the community, and in fact being regarded very much as the hero of the hour.

But while I had been lying in my room, idle in body but abnormally active in brain, the matter had presented itself to me in a very different light, and I was by no means sure that, were the facts made public, I should not be looked upon as a knave rather than as a hero. I had to ask myself seriously whether the course I had taken could be justified at all, and whether, by withholding from the authorities the suspicion I entertained about the man with the red beard, and by taking upon myself the responsibility of keeping, unaided, an eye upon his movements,

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I was not morally answerable for the lives which had been lost in the last terrible outrage he had effected.

It was quite possible that, had I gone to the authorities *before* the event and informed them of my unsupported suspicion, I should have been laughed at for my pains. But were I to come forward *after* the event and admit that before the outrage occurred, and while yet there was time to prevent it, I had suspected the man with the brown bag to be James Mullen, and yet had withheld my suspicions from the police, I might be looked upon as less of a fool than a scoundrel.

My motives for having kept silent would be open to the worst interpretation, and I should be everywhere denounced as an enemy of society whose criminal vanity had made him think himself capable of coping single-handed with the greatest artist in crime of the century, and whose yet more criminal greed and anxiety to secure the entire reward for himself had led him to withhold from the proper authorities information by means of which the capture of the arch-murderer might have been effected and the last dreadful outrage prevented.

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Knowing, as I did, how uncontrollable was the feeling of the populace in regard to the outrage, I could not disguise from myself that a man who made such a confession as I had to make, would — should he be recognised in the streets — run a very good chance of being mobbed, if not lynched.

An infuriated mob is not given to make nice distinctions, and so long as it has a scapegoat on which to wreak vengeance it does not wait to inquire too particularly into the question of the scapegoat's innocence or guilt.

Let the object of its wrath be not forthcoming, and let some evil or foolish person raise the cry that this or that luckless passer-by is the offender's relative or friend, or even that he has been seen coming from the offender's house, or is of the same nationality, and in nine cases out of ten the mob will "go" for the luckless wight *en masse*.

I have made a study of that wild beast which we call "a mob" — the one wild beast which civilisation has given us in exchange for the many she has driven away — and knowing something of the creature and its habits, I must confess that I would rather fall into the jaws of the

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wild beast of the jungle, than into the clutches of the wilder beast of the city and the slum.

One day — one not very distant day — that wild beast will turn and rend its keepers, and when once the thing has tasted human blood it will not be beaten back into its lair with its thirst for blood unglutted.

To be mobbed or lynched in a noble cause and in support of a great principle is not without its compensations, but there is no glory in being subjected to physical violence and personal insult as a scoundrel and a knave.

Worse, however, than the possibility of being mobbed was the certainty of being held up in many quarters as an object for public odium and private scorn, and the more I thought about it the less inclined did I feel to face the consequences of confessing the part which I had played in the recent tragedy. It was upon my own responsibility, I argued, that I had entered upon the enterprise, and so long as I kept within the law it was to myself only that I was responsible for the way in which that enterprise was carried on. That I had failed meant nothing more than that what had happened to those whose business and whose duty it was to have

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succeeded, had happened also to me; and, after all, I left things no worse than they were when I took the matter up.

Had it been my intention to abandon my quest I should have no choice but to acquaint New Scotland Yard with what had come to my knowledge. But, as a matter of fact, I was more than ever set on bringing the miscreant, Captain Shannon, to justice — and this not merely for the sake of reward, or because of the craving for adventure which had first urged me to the enterprise, but because of the loathing which I entertained for the monster whom I had with my own eyes seen at his hellish work. Hence I was justified, I told myself, in keeping my information to myself, and the more so for the fact that, were I to say all I knew, the particulars would no doubt be made public, and in this way reach the ears of Captain Shannon, thus defeating the very end for which I had made my confession.

Into the questions whether the decision to which I came was right or wrong, and whether the arguments, with which I sought to square my decision with my conscience and my sense of duty, were founded on self-interest and inclination rather than on reason, I will not here enter.

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When that decision was once made, I gave no further thought to the rights or wrongs of the matter, but dismissing every such consideration from my mind I concentrated all my energies upon the task of finding Captain Shannon.

And first, I decided to pay a visit to Southend to see if the little brown cutter was still there, and if not, to discover what had become of it.

As one walks down the High Street from the station, the pier lies directly in front, running out a mile and a quarter to sea on its myriad slender feet like a giant centipede. To the right are the shady shrubberies and sunny grass-crowned cliffs of New Southend, and to the left, with lips stooped to the water's edge, the Old Town straggles away seaward, a long line of picturesque irregular buildings — some cheerful red, others warm yellow, and a few cool gray — reminding one not a little of some quaint French or Belgian port blinking in the morning sunshine.

And oh! such skies! such cloud-pomp and pageantry, and, above all, such sunrises and sunsets! Such dance and sparkle of moving water when the tide is in, and, more beautiful still,

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when the tide is out, such play of light and shadow, such wonderful wealth of colour on the marshy flats — here a patch of royal purple or opalescent green, there a rose-gray or pearly-pink, with little shining pools changing from blue to silver and silver to blue with the passing of every cloud.

Southend is a pretty spot at any time, but after a month spent on a sick bed in a stuffy London side-street, the view from the pier-hill seemed to me exceptionally beautiful.

As I stood there drinking my fill of the sweet, strong, brackish air, and basking in the sunshine, I was conscious of being scrutinised quietly but very keenly by a man who was lounging near the Royal Hotel.

There was nothing in his appearance or dress — white flannel trousers and shirt, cricketing blazer and straw hat — to distinguish him from the hundreds of holiday makers in like attire who are to be seen in and about Southend during the season, but I recognised him at once, and with some alarm, as one of the cleverest officers of the detective force, and one, moreover, who had been specially told off to effect the capture of Mullen.

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In detective stories, as in pantomimes — no doubt for the same reason — the policeman is too often held up to scorn and ridicule as an incompetent bungler who is more dangerous to the hearts of susceptible servant girls than to law-breakers, and more given to deeds of prowess in connection with the contents of the pantry than in protecting the lives or properties of her Majesty's subjects. The hero of the detective story is very often a brilliant amateur, of whom the police are secretly jealous, notwithstanding the fact that whenever they have a difficult case they come, hat in hand, to seek his assistance. This, after a little light banter for the benefit of the Boswell who is to chronicle his marvellous doings — and in the course of which, by-the-bye, the fact that the police are about to arrest the wrong man is not unfrequently elicited — he condescends to give, the understanding between him and them being that he shall do the work and they take the credit.

Why the amateur detective should be the victim of a modesty which is not always characteristic of the amateur in other professions does not transpire, but the arrangement is extremely convenient to the policeman and to the author,

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the latter probably adopting it lest inquisitive readers should ask why, if there are such brilliant amateur detectives as authors would have us to believe, we never hear of them in real life.

Now I should be the last man in the world to cheapen the work of my fellow-craftsmen. I hold that there is no more unmistakable mark of a mean mind than is evinced in the desire to extol oneself at the expense of others, but none the less I must enter my protest against what I cannot but consider an unwarrantable imputation upon a very deserving body of men.

Detectives and policemen, taken as a whole, are by no means the bunglers and boobies that they are made out to be in the pantomimes and in the pages of detective stories. I do not say that they are all born geniuses in the detection of crime, for genius is no commoner among detectives than it is among bakers, bankers, clergymen, novelists, barristers, or cooks. But what I do say is that the rank and file of them are painstaking and intelligent men, who do their duty to the public conscientiously and efficiently; and to dub them all duffers, because

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now and then a detective is caught napping, is as unjust as to pronounce all clergymen fools because a silly sermon is sometimes preached from a pulpit.

I had managed to get ahead of the police in the investigation I was conducting, not because of the shining abilities with which I was endowed, for as the reader knows I had bungled matters sadly on more than one occasion, but because Fate had thrown a clue in my way at the start. But I have never underrated the acuteness and astuteness of the representatives of the Criminal Department from New Scotland Yard, and it did not greatly surprise me to find, when I commenced operations again at Southend, that though the little brown cutter was still lying off the same spot, she was being closely watched by men whom I knew to be detectives.

Whether they had discovered the relationship between Mullen and the owner of the "Odd Trick," and in following up the clue had traced the boat to Southend, or whether they were in possession of information unknown to me which led them to believe the fugitive had been hiding in the neighbourhood, I could not say; but that they were there to effect the capture of Mullen,

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should he return to the cutter, I made no doubt.

Mullen, however, was apparently too wary a bird to come back to the nest until he had satisfied himself that no net had been spread there to catch him, for that he had got wind of what was going on at Southend seemed probable from the fact that he never put in an appearance there again. Nor would it have profited me personally if he had, for in that case I could scarcely hope to forestall the police in the matter of his arrest.

Under the circumstances it would be mere waste of time to stay in Southend, and the question I had now to ask myself was, "Where, then, is he likely to be?"

As crime begets crime, so question begets question, and "Where, then, is he likely to be?" had scarcely come to the birth before it was itself in travail with, "Why not on the 'Cuban Queen'?"

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CHAPTER XXVII

I PLAY A GAME OF "BLUFF" WITH HUGHES

"WHY not on the 'Cuban Queen' indeed?" I repeated, as I called to mind the fact that it was there Mullen had lain secure when the hue and cry were at their height. It was only when the hue and cry had somewhat subsided that he had ventured forth to commence his devilry afresh; and what was more likely, now that the hue and cry had been raised once more, than that he should have crept back to his former hiding-place?

The next afternoon I was in the little cottage at Canvey again, and should have been there sooner but for the fact that I wished first to satisfy myself that my movements were not being watched by the police.

I did not intend on this occasion to waste time in trying to find out whether Hughes had any one on board with him or not, especially as I was now without Quickly's assistance. This

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was a case in which it seemed to me safer to achieve my purpose by a bold stroke than to adopt the more cautious course of beating about the bush. The thing to do would be to engage Hughes in conversation, and when he was off his guard to charge him suddenly with sheltering a fugitive from justice on board the "Cuban Queen." The cleverest rogue is apt to betray himself when a surprise is thus sprung upon him, and such a clumsy rascal as Hughes should not be difficult to deal with. I did not doubt that he would deny the impeachment with much bluster and more bad language, but by keeping a keen eye upon his face when playing my game of "bluff" I hoped to be able to come to some definite conclusion in regard to the theory I had formed concerning Mullen's whereabouts.

But I had yet to catch the hare which I felt so competent to cook, and of the two tasks the former promised to be the more difficult. Hughes, as the reader already knows, did not often leave the hulk, and as it was quite out of the question that I should seek him there, some plan for making it necessary for him to come ashore must be devised. After much brain-cudgelling I hit upon an idea which I immedi-

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ately proceeded to carry out. The oil which was burned in Hughes' cabin was taken out to him every Monday and Thursday by the attendant whose duty it was to fetch and carry for the caretakers of the hulks. I knew that it was so as the man had to pass my door on his way to the boat, and I had seen the tin can in his hand repeatedly. As a matter of fact, I was at that moment reminded of the matter, for the day was Thursday, and the man in question was just going by my gate, carrying the can in one hand and a small sack of potatoes in the other. If I did not avail myself of this opportunity I should have to wait until the following Monday before taking action, so I at once opened the door and hailed him.

"I want you to do a little commission for me," I said. "You 'll be going down to the village some time to-day, I know. Could you leave a letter to Mr. Hayes at the vicarage?"

"Yes, sir," he said civilly; "with pleasure."

"That 's right. Put that sack and the can down and come into the other room while I scribble the letter. I daresay I can find you a glass of grog in there and a cut of cold beef if you feel like having a mouthful."

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"Thank you, sir," he said, unburdening himself of his load and following me into the inner room. I had not finished my own breakfast very long, and a small joint was still on the table.

"Pull up and help yourself," I said, producing knife and fork. "What 'll you have to drink? I 've got some old rum. How 'll that suit you?"

"Capital, sir," he replied.

"All right. It 's in the other room, I think. I 'll be back in a moment. You make a start, meanwhile, on the cold beef."

No sooner was I in the other room with the closed door between us than I whipped out the cork from the paraffin can, and seizing a siphon of soda-water that stood upon the table — it was the only liquid handy — I slipped the spout into the mouth of the can and pressed the tap.

"If this is n't pouring oil on the troubled waters it 's at least pouring troubled waters on the oil," I said to myself, when half a tumbler of soda had hissed into the can. "There 'll be some rosy language about when Hughes goes to light his lamp after filling it up with this stuff, for he 'll never get it to light, much less

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to burn. And if he does n't make the discovery too early the man who looks after his requirements will be gone, and Master Hughes will have to sit in the dark and go to bed with his supper uncooked, or come into Canvey and get some more oil. He *may*, of course, get filling up his cooking stove in the daytime, and find the oil won't burn, or he may have enough left in it to carry him through. But anyhow, if the thing does n't work out as I hope, there will be no harm done, for at the worst they can only suppose that some water has accidentally got into the can."

The thing *did* work out as I had hoped, however, for as night was beginning to close in I saw Hughes unlashing the dinghy as if to come ashore, and judging from the sounds which broke the evening stillness I had reason to believe that he was at his old habit of swearing aloud to himself. This is a habit which is more soothing to the swearer than to an enforced listener, especially when the swearer is rowing a heavy boat against the tide, and jerks out a fresh and aggressively emphasised oath with each expulsion of breath. On this

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occasion the hopes which were expressed about the soul, eyes, limbs, and internal organs of every one who had been connected with the offending oil, beginning with the individual who "struck" it, and finishing off with the shopkeeper who sold it, and the man who brought it to the hulks, were distinctly uncharitable.

Nor did Hughes confine himself to human beings, for the unfortunate can in which the oil had been carried and the various matches which had been struck in his unavailing efforts to light the lamp were with strict impartiality similarly banned.

"Oil!" he growled as he ran the boat ashore. "I 'll oil 'im and the man wot sold it too!" (More hopes in regard to the soul, eyes, limbs, and internal organs of the offender.) "A pretty fine fool 'e made o' me, standin' there burnin' my fingers and a box of matches trying to find out what was wrong. Oil! Call that spluttering' stuff oil! Why, I might as well 'ave tried to set fire to the river."

Still swearing, he made fast the dinghy and proceeded, can in hand, in the direction of the village.

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After a time I started to follow, and overtook him just as he was passing my cottage.

"Good-night," I called out over my shoulder in passing, as is the custom in the country.

He replied by bidding me go to a place which, though it may likely enough have been his ultimate destination, I sincerely hope may never be mine nor the reader's.

"I 'm sure I know that dulcet voice," I said, stopping and wheeling round. "It must be, it *is*, the genial Hughes. How are you, my worthy fellow?"

The worthy fellow intimated that his health was not noticeably affected for the better by the sight of me.

"Oh, don't say that," I said. "You were most hospitable to me in the matter of drinks when I had the pleasure of spending a very delightful hour in your company on board the 'Cuban Queen' one evening. Pray let me return the compliment. This is my cottage, and I 've got some excellent whisky aboard. Won't you come in and have a glass?"

This was a temptation not to be withstood, and he replied a little more civilly that he "did n't mind," and even unbent so far as to

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answer Yes or No to one or two casual remarks I made.

When he rose to go, some spirit of mischief prompted me to ask him what he had in the oilcan, and this, apparently recalling his grievance, put him in the worst of tempers again, for he snatched at it, savagely blurting out, —

"What the dickens 'as that got to do with you?"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, you scoundrel!" I said sharply, taking a step towards him. "Answer me like that again, and I 'll give you a lesson you won't forget!"

"*You*, yer bloomin' monkey!" he snarled, spitting on the ground in front of me as an outward and visible sign of his contempt. "*You* give me a lesson! And where should I be, do yer think?"

I looked him full in the face and shot my bolt.

"You would be in prison, my good fellow, for harbouring a murderer, disguised as a woman, and you 'd be charged with being an accessory after the fact."

He stepped back, paling visibly under his

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bronze complexion, and answered, for once, without an oath.

"'E ain't a murderer. 'E's a private soldier wot struck 'is superior officer for comin' between 'im and 'is wife, and then deserted. I see it myself in the paper 'e showed me, and I 'd 'a done the same if I 'd bin in 'is place. And so 'd you, Mister."

"Ho, ho! my friend," I said to myself. "I was a 'monkey' a moment ago — now I 'm a 'Mister.' So you are funking it already, are you?"

And then, aloud, —

"Do you think any jury will believe that you thought a private soldier could afford to pay you what that man's paying? Now, look here! I 've got the whip hand of you, but I don't wish you any harm, personally. If you 'll do exactly as I tell you, and play me fair, I 'll pay you the sum that yonder man 's paying you, and you sha'n't get into any trouble if I can help it."

"Wot d' yer want me to do?" he asked.

"Answer me one question first. Supposing I were to arrange to take your place on the 'Cuban Queen' for a couple of days. In that case the man who waits on the hulks would

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have to be squared to keep his mouth shut. Could that be done?"

"P'raps. 'E ain't the inspector. 'E's paid to wait on us, so as we don't 'ave to leave the 'ulks. 'T ain't 'is business to look after what we do. P'raps 'e might if it wos worth 'is while."

"Very well. I 'll give you the money to-night to square him, and some on account for yourself as well. And now another question. Where does your wife live?"

"Mill Lane, Chelmsford."

"That 's all right. When you get back to the 'Cuban Queen' you 'll get a telegram from Chelmsford to say she 's dying, and that you must go to her. You must show that to the man you 've got aboard. What do you call him by-the-bye?"

"Winton."

"Well, you must show the telegram to Winton, and tell him you intend applying for leave, and that he must go somewhere else in the meantime. He won't want to leave the only safe hiding-place he 's got, and he 'll try and persuade you not to go, and will perhaps offer you a big money bribe to stay. You must

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persist in going; but after a time you must say that you have a brother at Southend who could come and take your place while you are away, and that you are sure he 'd keep his mouth shut if he were well paid. Winton will *have* to consent if you persist. Then you 'll send a telegram to me, as if I were your brother, asking me to come over to see you; and when I come you 'll show me the telegram and ask me to take charge of the hulk while you go away to see your wife. I shall come at night, so as not to be seen, and shall pretend to agree, and then you can go ashore and put up at my cottage here until I signal you to return. Do as I tell you, and play me fair, and I 'll give you fifty pounds for yourself when it 's all over. What do you say?"

"Can't be done," he answered sullenly.

"Why not?"

"'Cos it can't."

"Very well. Good-night, then. I 'm going straight from this house to the coastguard station, and shall send two armed men out to the hulk to arrest the murderer you 've been harbouring, and two more to arrest you — you can't get far away in the meantime — for harbouring

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him and for being an accessory after the fact. I suppose you know what the punishment for that is? And when you come out you 'll be a ruined man. The hulk-owners will discharge you without a character for gross violation of rules."

He looked murder, and had he been less of a coward might have attempted as well as looked it. Then something seemed to occur to him, and he stood staring absently at me while turning the matter over in his bovine brain. I guessed the upshot of his meditations to be somewhat as follows: "This man, whoever he is, has me in his power and can ruin me. I wish he were out of the way, but I don't mean risking my own neck for him. If I let him go on the hulk Winton is more than likely to suspect he 's a spy. In that case he 's just the sort of man to knock the meddling fool on the head, and the job I want done would get done without my putting my neck in a noose."

Anyhow, he looked at me curiously for a minute, and then said, in a more conciliatory tone, —

"What are you going to do to Winton?"

"Arrest him by-and-bye. If I can I 'll keep

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your name out of it. If I can't, and you lose your crib, I 'll make it up to you in some way. But let me tell you one thing: you 'd better play me fair, or it will be the worse for you. The "Cuban Queen" is being watched night and day, and if you tell Winton of your meeting with me, and he tries to escape or you try to give us the slip yourself, you 'll be instantly arrested, and it will go hard with you then. Play me fair and I 'll play you fair, and no harm need come to you at all in the matter. Once more, will you come to my terms? If not, I 'm off to the coastguard station. There 's only one policeman in Canvey, and I shall want two or three men — armed men — for Winton, and the same for you. I mean business, I can tell you. Come, is it Yes or No?"

"Yes," he answered, with a horrible oath. And then we sat down to arrange the details of our little conspiracy.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

I BOARD THE "CUBAN QUEEN" FOR THE SECOND TIME.

BUT when you had satisfied yourself that there *was* a man in hiding on the 'Cuban Queen,'" says the reader, "and when you had every reason for suspecting that man to be Mullen, why not at once arrest him? Why go to work like Tom Sawyer in 'Huckleberry Finn,' who, when he wished to rescue Jim the nigger from the woodshed, must needs make a seven days' job of it, and dig the poor wretch out, when it would have been an easy matter to abstract the key and let him out through the door?"

Why? Well, for several reasons, one of which is that the story would then have been shorter and perhaps less interesting. Another is that, though it is true I had good cause to suppose the man in hiding to be James Mullen, I had no actual proof of his identity.

The reader must remember that I had seen him but twice in my life. The first time was

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in the train, going down to Southend, when my only cause for suspecting him to be Mullen was a fancied likeness to the published portrait. The second was on the day of the explosion at the Post Office, and on that occasion he had been cleverly disguised, and we had not come to close quarters until after dark, when the difficulty of identification is greatly increased.

Were I, as matters then stood, to give information to the police, I could only claim to be the means of accomplishing his arrest, whereas, if I could once obtain satisfactory proof of his identity my chain of evidence would be complete, and now that I had spent so much time, thought and money on the enterprise, I preferred to carry it through myself rather than hand it over to some one else at the last moment.

By taking Hughes' place upon the "Cuban Queen" I hoped to obtain the necessary evidence, and once such evidence was in my possession, I should lose no time in effecting an arrest.

The morning after my interview with Hughes I took train to Chelmsford, and thence despatched the pretended telegram from his wife. When I got back to Southend, the telegram

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which Hughes was to send to his supposed brother was waiting for me at the address we had arranged between us. Lest the police should be tampering with letters and telegrams, I had arranged that Hughes' message should contain nothing more than a request that Bill Hughes would come over to see his brother Jim at Canvey.

To Canvey I accordingly went, calling first at my cottage, where I arrayed myself in a well-worn suit of waterman's clothes, which I had kept there all along lest I should at any time have to assume a disguise. My next procedure was to shave off the beard which I had been wearing on the night of the explosion at the Post Office. The fact that the night had been very dark was against Mullen's knowing me again, for though the bursting of the bomb had lit up the whole neighbourhood, the street in which our encounter had taken place was entirely in shadow, owing to the height of the buildings on either side.

That it was quite possible he would recognise me, if only by my voice, I fully realised, and I knew perfectly well that every moment I spent in his company my life would be in my own

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hands; but I flattered myself that I was more than a match for him in a fair fight, and in regard to foul play, — well, forewarned is forearmed, and I was not unprepared.

I waited until it was dark before starting for the hulk. Hughes came on deck in reply to my hail, and proved a better actor than might have been expected. After he had inquired gruffly, "Is that you, Bill?" and I had responded, "Bill it is, Jim," and had been bidden come aboard, he went on — in response to my question of "Wot 's up?" — to speak his part in the little play which we had rehearsed together. He informed me he had had a telegram to say that his wife was ill, and that he wished to go to her, but did not like applying for relief because he had a cove on board, disguised as a woman (this in a lowered voice, according to instruction), who had got into a scrape and wanted to lie low awhile.

My supposed brother then went on to ask me if I would take charge of the hulk in his absence, assuring me that the cove was "a good un to pay," and that the job would be worth a five-pound note if I promised to keep my mouth shut.

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right hand a note which he had taken from the lining of his cap, and smearing his forehead with the back of his left hand, as if to hint that if he were damp outside he was dry within.

"Give him some beer," I said to my skipper, as I opened the note.

It was in Grant's writing, and was as follows: —

"Come as fast as you can to Going's Oyster Bar, in the High Street, exactly opposite the Royal Hotel. Come ready to go to town if necessary. If I 'm gone when you get to Going's, wait there till you receive wire from me.

"F. G."

As luck would have it, I was already dressed, and in a blue-serge suit, which, if somewhat shabby, would be inconspicuous anywhere. I did at first think of changing my yachting shoes — which had tan uppers with gutta-percha soles — for black boots, but it occurred to me that the shoes would be extremely convenient for shadowing, and as the tan uppers made them look like the now common brown shoe, I decided to go as I was.

"Can you wait here while one of my men and I row ashore?" I said to the messenger, tossing

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my yachting cap into an open locker and putting on the customary hard felt. "He 'll be fresher than you are, and I don't want to lose a minute."

"Yes, sir; I 'm in no hurry," the man replied.

"All right. Here 's something for yourself. Jump in, Brown. You take one oar and I 'll take the other. Make for the beach, just below the Royal Hotel. The tide is running in fast, and I shall get there quicker by boat than if you landed me at the pier and I walked. Put your back into it, and I ought to be ashore well inside a quarter of an hour."

Brown bent to with such will that, by means of our united efforts, I was at Going's Oyster Bar within twenty minutes from receiving the message. Grant was sitting where he had a full view of the hotel opposite, but could not himself be seen from outside. He had his eyes upon the hotel when I entered, and, except for one quick glance at me, never took them off again, but motioned me with his hand to the chair beside him. No one was in the shop, so, without further ado, he began his story.

"I came ashore last evening to post a letter,"

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he said, "but kept an eye on the cutter all the same, and, as it was a fine evening, strolled up and down the Esplanade before going back to turn in for the night. By-and-bye I saw a boat coming off from cutter, two men in it, and making for shore. Waited to see where they were going to land, and then hid behind bathing machine to shadow 'em. A man got out — looked as if he had reddish hair and beard — and the other one took dinghy back to cutter. Man with red beard went to station. It was past eleven, and there'd be no up train, so I supposed he'd be going on to Shoebury by the last down train just about due, and decided to go with him. Down train came in, but he turned as if he'd just come by it, and went to Royal Hotel. He could n't know me, so I followed, bold as brass. Heard him ask for bed, and I did same. His room was opposite mine, and I saw him go in. I did n't go to bed all night lest I should oversleep. Peeped out at six and saw his boots outside, so he was still there evidently. Dressed and came down — boots still outside. Would n't wait for breakfast — came out — slipped in here — sent note to you — had breakfast — paid bill, but said would

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wait, as friend was to join me, and here I am. He has n't come out yet. Wonder if there 's any way out from hotel at back? Great Scott! there he is! Is that your man?"

I looked and saw a man, with reddish hair and beard, and a brown bag in his hand, leave the hotel and turn to the left in the direction of the station.

"Don't know," I said. "I can't say I recognise him; but there is something — I don't know what — about him that seems familiar. Anyhow, we 'll shadow him. He is going to the station, I expect, to catch the 10.12 up. I 'll hail that closed carriage passing by. You jump in and drive to station. You must get there before him. Book to town, and get in fore part of train. I 'll follow on behind him and get in back part. Wait in the train till he has passed your carriage at Fenchurch, and join me as I go by."

Grant's reply was to jump into the cab with the words "London and Tilbury railway. Fast as you can," and I soon had the satisfaction of seeing him whirled past the man with the red beard, and disappear round the corner which led to the station.

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"The man *may* go by the other line — the Great Eastern," I said to myself as I followed at a respectful distance, "in which case I must do the same, and shan't see Grant at the other end, which is awkward, as we have n't arranged a meeting-place. But I had n't time to think of everything, and as the 10.12 will be starting directly it *does* look as if he was going by that. Ah! he *has* turned the Tilbury line corner, so it 's all right after all."

I waited at the door a moment while the red-bearded man was taking his ticket. "Fenchurch — third single," he said briskly. "Fenchurch — third single," I repeated as soon as he had passed the barrier, and, hurrying after, was just in time to see him enter a third smoker in the centre of the train. I slipped quietly into a carriage in the rear, and in another couple of minutes we were puffing out of Southend.

Although the man I was shadowing had booked to Fenchurch Street, I thought it wise at every stoppage to keep an eye upon the passengers who left the train; and so we journeyed on, making calls at Westcliff, Leigh, Benfleet, Pitsea Laindon, East Horndon, Upminster and

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Hornchurch. At the last-named stopping-place a burly farmer, with a body like a bullock, leant half out of the window of my carriage to carry on a conversation with a friend upon the platform, and in doing so blocked my view completely.

"Will you allow me to get a paper, please?" I said, fuming with impatience at not being able to obtain a peep outside, although the train was already moving.

"So I tould 'im I 'd give 'im five pun' ten," continued the yokel leisurely, but interpolating a surly "Yer can't get one 'ere," which he threw at me over his shoulder without turning his head or attempting to withdraw from the window; "I tould 'im I 'd give 'im five pun' ten" — this to the friend who was running along the platform beside the now quickly-moving train — "and he sez, sez he, 'I 'd rather give 'im to yer.' Ha, ha, ha!"

In despair I thrust my head under his arm just in time to see the man with the red beard disappearing, brown bag and all, through the place where tickets were collected. To get out and follow him was impossible, for the yokel drew in his great shoulders almost at the same

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moment that I put my head out, and in so doing wedged me into the window like a plug in a cask, and by the time I could extricate myself the train had cleared the station and was spanking along toward London.

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CHAPTER XXIV

A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH!

HERE was a pretty kettle of fish! For the first desperate moment wild thoughts of pulling the connecting cord and stopping the train peeped in my brain like the mad faces seen at the windows of an asylum. But as the mad faces vanish at the return of the keeper, so in the next moment wiser counsels prevailed and I was considering the situation with the seriousness which the facts demanded.

And first I had to ask myself what could be the red-bearded passenger's motive for booking to London, and then suddenly changing his plans and getting out at an unimportant country station? Could it be that he was indeed James Mullen, and that he was at his old tricks of covering up his tracks?

If he had reason to believe himself shadowed from Southend, he could have done nothing wiser than to alight at Hornchurch. A detective who suspected the traveller's identity and

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had watched him enter the train at one end would in all probability telegraph to the police to meet the train at the other end and effect an arrest. By getting out at Hornchurch, Mullen would not only dodge this possible danger, but would, so to speak, force his adversary to come out into the open, for though shadowing can be carried on with small risk of detection in London, where the person so engaged is only a unit in a crowd, a shadower cannot possibly hope to escape notice in a country village.

Altogether I had to admit that, even if I had seen the red-bearded man get out at Hornchurch in time for me to follow him, I should have been uncertain how to act. Probably not more than two passengers would be likely to leave the train at such a place, and it would be comparatively easy for a man like Mullen to decide who had legitimate business in the neighbourhood and who had not. Had I been one of these passengers I should have brought myself under his direct notice, and this I was anxious to avoid, as it was quite possible that, in order to obtain evidence of his identity, circumstances might render it necessary for me to come in personal contact with him.

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So far as I knew, he was at that time unaware of my connection with Green and Quickly, whose action in constituting themselves private detectives he might reasonably suppose had been taken upon their own responsibility, and in the hope of enriching themselves by obtaining the offered reward.

Knowing, as I did, how long was Mullen's arm and how merciless his vengeance, I could not help thinking that had he been aware of my connection with the two men I have mentioned, and of my intentions towards himself, he would before this have made an attempt to bestow upon me some such unmistakable mark of his personal attention as he had bestowed upon them. That no such attempt had been made argued — so at least I tried to persuade myself — that I had been lucky enough to escape his notice and the honour of being entered upon his black list. To have got out at Hornchurch and denounced the red-bearded man as Captain Shannon, when I had no shred of actual evidence in support of my statement, and when it was more than possible he might be some one else, would not only render me ridiculous, but would mean trumping my own card by making

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known to the real Captain Shannon, as well as to the public generally, the enterprise upon which I was engaged.

All things considered, the incident which had prevented me from seeing the man I was shadowing leave the train at Hornchurch until it was too late to follow him was not an unmixed evil, for it was possible that had I been compelled to act upon the spur of the moment I might have adopted a course which I should afterwards have reason to regret.

While I had been coming to this conclusion the train had been trundling along towards the next station, and was already slowing off for a stoppage. If I were to take action I must do so immediately, and for the moment I found it difficult to decide whether it would be best to go on to London or to get out and make my way back to Hornchurch, in order to pursue inquiries about the red-bearded man and his movements.

If he were, as I suspected, James Mullen, the chances were that he had got out at Hornchurch, not because he had any business there, but to put a possible pursuer at fault. In that case he would go on to London — which was in all

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probability his destination — by a later train, or it was possible that he might seek other means of reaching town than by the line on which he had set out.

And then, all in a moment, I recollected what I ought to have recollected at first, — that Hornchurch is but a half an hour's walk from Romford, where there is a station on the Great Eastern railway.

Might it not be, I asked myself, that Mullen, knowing this, had got out at Hornchurch in order that he might walk to Romford, and thence continue his journey to town by another line? Such a manœuvre as this was just what one might expect from him, and I promptly decided to act upon the assumption that he had done so.

At Fenchurch Street I joined Grant, and told him in a few hurried words what had happened, and what were my suspicions.

"If Redbeard has got upon the Great Eastern line at Romford," I said, "he can't go farther than Liverpool Street, the terminus. He may of course 'do' us by getting out at some station immediately preceding the terminus, but that I must chance, and it's not at all unlikely

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he may come on by an express that does n't stop at the intermediate stations. Anyhow, I 'm going to cab it to Liverpool Street to watch all the Romford trains. You stay here — where you can't be seen, of course — and keep an eye upon the other trains that come in. If you see Redbeard, shadow him, and wire me to the club when you 've got any news. But remember Quickly and Green, and take care of yourself. Good-bye."

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CHAPTER XXV

JAMES MULLEN AND I MEET AT LAST

AS the cab which I had chartered rattled up the approach to the Great Eastern terminus at Liverpool Street, I had to admit to myself that the probability of my falling in again with the red-bearded man scarcely justified me in feeling so sanguine as I did.

I am not in the general way given to "presentiments," but on this occasion I felt almost childishly confident about the result of my operations. Though I told myself, over and over again, that there is nothing so hope-destroying to an active mind as compulsory inaction, and that it was only because I had something definite with which to occupy myself that I felt so hopeful, not all my philosophy could persuade me that I should fail in bringing the enterprise to a successful termination.

Curiously enough, presentiment was for once justified of her assurance, and at the expense of

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philosophy, for as the clocks were chiming eight, and evening was beginning to close in, whom should I see step out upon the platform from a Romford train but my gentleman of the red beard and brown bag.

He gave up his ticket and walked out of the station into Liverpool Street, crossed the road and went up New Broad Street and so to the Bank. Then he went into a tobacconist's, whence he emerged puffing a big cigar, and proceeded up Cheapside until he reached Foster Lane, down which he turned. Here I had to be more cautious, for on Saturday night the side streets of the City are deserted. Even in the great thoroughfares, where during the five preceding days blows have rained thick and fast, with scarce a moment's interval, upon the ringing anvils of traffic, there is a perceptible lull, but in the side streets there is absolute silence.

When I saw the man with the red beard and brown bag turn down Foster Lane, which, as every Londoner knows, is a narrow side street at the back of the General Post Office, I felt that it was indeed a happy thought which had prevented me from changing my shoes when I

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received Grant's summons in the morning. Had I been wearing my ordinary lace-ups I should have been in a dilemma, for they are not easy to remove in a hurry, and in that deserted place the echo of my following footsteps, had I been thus shod, could not have failed to reach the ear of the man I was shadowing. To have followed him boldly would have aroused his suspicions, whereas if I remained far enough behind to avoid running this risk, I incurred the greater risk of losing sight of him altogether.

But for the purposes of shadowing, nothing could be better than the gutta-percha-soled shoes which I was wearing; and by keeping well in the shadow, and only flitting from doorway to doorway at such times as I judged it safe to make a move, I hoped to keep an eye upon Redbeard unseen.

The result justified my anticipations, for when he reached the back of the General Post Office he stopped and looked hastily up and down the street, as if to make sure that he was unobserved. Not a soul was in sight, and I need scarcely say that I made of myself a very wafer, and was clinging like a postage stamp to the door against which I had squared myself.

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Evidently reassured, he put down his bag, opened it, and lifted out something that, from the stiff movement of his arms, appeared to be heavy. This he placed upon the ground, and so gingerly that I distinctly heard him sigh as he drew his hands away. Then he stood erect, puffed fiercely at his cigar until it kindled and glowed like a live coal, took it from his lips, turned the lighted end round to look at it, and stooped with it in his hand over the thing upon the ground. I saw an answering spark shine out, flicker for a moment and die away, and heard Redbeard mutter "Damnation! Hell!" through his teeth. The next instant I heard the spurt that told of the striking of a lucifer match, and saw him stoop again over the thing on the ground. A little point of light, which grew in size and brightness, shone out as I stood looking on half paralysed with horror. That he had fired the fuse of an infernal machine I had no doubt, and for one moment my limbs absolutely refused to move. I tried to call out, but gave utterance only to a silly inarticulate noise that was more like a bleat than a cry, and was formed neither by my lips nor tongue, but seemed to come from the back of

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my throat. The sound reached the ears of the man with the bag, however, for he came to an erect posture in an instant, looked quickly to right and to left, and then walked briskly away in the opposite direction.

And then the night-stillness was broken by the most terrible cry I have ever heard — a cry so terrible and unearthly that it seemed to make the blood in my veins run cold, although I knew that it was from my own lips and no other that the cry had fallen.

That cry broke the spell that bound me. Even while it was ringing in my ears I leapt out like a tiger athirst for blood, and, heedless of the hissing fuse, which burnt the faster and brighter for the wind which I made as I rushed by it, I was after him, every drop of blood in my body boiling with fury, every muscle and tendon of my fingers twitching to grip the miscreant's throat.

Had he been as fleet of foot as a greyhound he should not have escaped me then; and though he had thrown the bag away, and was now running for dear life, I was upon him before he was half-way down Noble Street. When he heard my steps he stopped and faced round

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suddenly, and as he did so I struck him with my clenched fist full under the jaw, and with all my strength. Shall I ever feel such savage joy as thrilled me then as I heard his teeth snap together like the snap of the teeth of an iron rat-trap, and felt the warm rush of his blood upon my hand? He went down like a pole-axed ox, but in the next second had staggered to his knees and thence to his feet. His hand was fumbling at a side-pocket, whence I saw the butt-end of a revolver protruding, but before he could get at it I had him by the throat again, where my blow had knocked the false red beard awry, and I promise you that my grip was none of the gentlest. Nor, for the matter of that, was my language, for — though I am by habit nice of speech and not given to oaths — words, which I have never used before nor since, bubbled up in my throat and would out, though a whole bench of listening bishops were by.

"You bloody monster!" I cried, and the words seemed to make iron of the muscles of my arm, and granite of every bone in my fist as I struck him again and again in the face with all my strength. "You hell miscreant

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and devil. By God in heaven I 'll pound the damned life out of you!"

And then the solid ground seemed to stagger and sway beneath me, and from the neighbourhood of the General Post Office came a sudden blaze of light in which I saw a tall chimney crook inward at the middle, as a leg is bent at the knee, and then snap in two like a sugar-stick. There was a low rumble, a roar like the discharge of artillery, followed by the strangest ripping, rending din as of the sudden tearing asunder of innumerable sheets of metal. I was conscious of the falling of masonry, of a choking limy dust, and then a red darkness closed in upon me with a crash, and I remember no more.

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CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

MY next recollection was that of opening my eyes to find myself lying at night in my room at Buckingham Street. I made an effort to sit up in bed, but my head had suddenly become curiously heavy — so heavy that the effort to raise it was almost too much for me, and I was glad to fall back upon the pillow, where I lay a moment feeling more faint and feeble than I had ever felt before. Then there glided gently into the room — into my bachelor room — a pleasant-looking young woman in a gray dress with white collar and cuffs.

"What 's happened, nurse?" I said, recognising at once what she was — which was more than could be said of my voice, for it had become so thin and piping that its unfamiliarity startled me.

"Oh, nothing has happened of any consequence," she replied smilingly, "except that

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you have not been very well. But you're mending now, and another day or two will see you quite yourself."

"What's been the matter with me?" I asked.

"You got a blow on the head by the fall of a chimney," she replied. "But I can't let you talk now. Mr. Grant is coming in to sleep here to-night, as I've promised to take a turn sitting up with a patient who is very ill. You can ask Mr. Grant to tell you anything you wish to know in the morning, but now you must go to sleep."

That something *had* happened, notwithstanding her assurance to the contrary, I felt sure; but what that something was I did not know, nor did I very much care, for I felt dull and silly, and more than inclined to follow her advice.

This I must in the end have done, for when next I opened my eyes it was broad daylight, and Grant was standing in his shirt sleeves before the looking-glass, shaving. My head was clearer now, and I was able to recall what had taken place up to the moment when I had lost my senses after the explosion at the General Post Office.

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"Have they got him, Grant?" I inquired.

He jumped like a "kicking" rifle.

"Good Lord! old man, how you startled me! You've made me slash myself horribly. Got whom?" he said.

"Mullen," I answered.

"Mullen? Oh, then you do know all about it? No, they have n't. But how are you feeling?"

"Like a boiled owl. How long have I been ill?"

"Three weeks. You got knocked on the head by a chimney-pot or something, and had a touch of concussion of the brain."

"Was there much damage done?"

"Damage? I believe you. The top of Cheapside pretty near blown away, and the General Post Office half wrecked."

"How did I get here?"

"In fine state, my boy — on a stretcher. They were taking you to the hospital when I came along — which I did as soon as I heard about the explosion — but I said I knew you, and told them who you were, and had you brought here instead. And a bad time you've had of it, I can tell you. But now you must n't talk any more."

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"Oh, I'm all right! Tell me, were there many people killed?"

"A good many in the Post Office, but not many outside. You see, being Saturday, most of the places were empty, except for caretakers. And now go to sleep."

"One more question only. Does any one know I was after Mullen when it happened?"

"No, they thought you were passing by chance. You see I told them who you were, but I could n't tell them what had happened, as I did n't know, and you could n't speak for yourself, so I thought I 'd better say nothing until you were well enough to tell your own story."

"And Mullen got clean away?"

"Look here, old man, this won't do, you know. The doctor said you were n't to be allowed to talk more than could be helped."

"Answer me that, then, and I 'll ask no more for the present."

"Yes, the ruffian got clean away, and no one knows to this day how he did it. Do you?"

"Yes. I saw him do it."

"The deuce you did! But there, you shall tell me all about it to-morrow. Have a drop of beef-tea and then go to bye-bye."

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Which I did.

My powers of recuperation are great, and a few days saw me comparatively well in body, though by no means easy in mind. Up to this point my search for Captain Shannon had seemed to me a somewhat public-spirited and deserving enterprise. To bring such a scoundrel to justice would be doing a service to the country and to humanity; and in the wild scene of excitement which I knew would follow the news of his arrest I liked to picture myself as receiving the thanks of the community, and in fact being regarded very much as the hero of the hour.

But while I had been lying in my room, idle in body but abnormally active in brain, the matter had presented itself to me in a very different light, and I was by no means sure that, were the facts made public, I should not be looked upon as a knave rather than as a hero. I had to ask myself seriously whether the course I had taken could be justified at all, and whether, by withholding from the authorities the suspicion I entertained about the man with the red beard, and by taking upon myself the responsibility of keeping, unaided, an eye upon his movements,

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I was not morally answerable for the lives which had been lost in the last terrible outrage he had effected.

It was quite possible that, had I gone to the authorities *before* the event and informed them of my unsupported suspicion, I should have been laughed at for my pains. But were I to come forward *after* the event and admit that before the outrage occurred, and while yet there was time to prevent it, I had suspected the man with the brown bag to be James Mullen, and yet had withheld my suspicions from the police, I might be looked upon as less of a fool than a scoundrel.

My motives for having kept silent would be open to the worst interpretation, and I should be everywhere denounced as an enemy of society whose criminal vanity had made him think himself capable of coping single-handed with the greatest artist in crime of the century, and whose yet more criminal greed and anxiety to secure the entire reward for himself had led him to withhold from the proper authorities information by means of which the capture of the arch-murderer might have been effected and the last dreadful outrage prevented.

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Knowing, as I did, how uncontrollable was the feeling of the populace in regard to the outrage, I could not disguise from myself that a man who made such a confession as I had to make, would — should he be recognised in the streets — run a very good chance of being mobbed, if not lynched.

An infuriated mob is not given to make nice distinctions, and so long as it has a scapegoat on which to wreak vengeance it does not wait to inquire too particularly into the question of the scapegoat's innocence or guilt.

Let the object of its wrath be not forthcoming, and let some evil or foolish person raise the cry that this or that luckless passer-by is the offender's relative or friend, or even that he has been seen coming from the offender's house, or is of the same nationality, and in nine cases out of ten the mob will "go" for the luckless wight *en masse*.

I have made a study of that wild beast which we call "a mob" — the one wild beast which civilisation has given us in exchange for the many she has driven away — and knowing something of the creature and its habits, I must confess that I would rather fall into the jaws of the

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wild beast of the jungle, than into the clutches of the wilder beast of the city and the slum.

One day — one not very distant day — that wild beast will turn and rend its keepers, and when once the thing has tasted human blood it will not be beaten back into its lair with its thirst for blood unglutted.

To be mobbed or lynched in a noble cause and in support of a great principle is not without its compensations, but there is no glory in being subjected to physical violence and personal insult as a scoundrel and a knave.

Worse, however, than the possibility of being mobbed was the certainty of being held up in many quarters as an object for public odium and private scorn, and the more I thought about it the less inclined did I feel to face the consequences of confessing the part which I had played in the recent tragedy. It was upon my own responsibility, I argued, that I had entered upon the enterprise, and so long as I kept within the law it was to myself only that I was responsible for the way in which that enterprise was carried on. That I had failed meant nothing more than that what had happened to those whose business and whose duty it was to have

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succeeded, had happened also to me; and, after all, I left things no worse than they were when I took the matter up.

Had it been my intention to abandon my quest I should have no choice but to acquaint New Scotland Yard with what had come to my knowledge. But, as a matter of fact, I was more than ever set on bringing the miscreant, Captain Shannon, to justice — and this not merely for the sake of reward, or because of the craving for adventure which had first urged me to the enterprise, but because of the loathing which I entertained for the monster whom I had with my own eyes seen at his hellish work. Hence I was justified, I told myself, in keeping my information to myself, and the more so for the fact that, were I to say all I knew, the particulars would no doubt be made public, and in this way reach the ears of Captain Shannon, thus defeating the very end for which I had made my confession.

Into the questions whether the decision to which I came was right or wrong, and whether the arguments, with which I sought to square my decision with my conscience and my sense of duty, were founded on self-interest and inclination rather than on reason, I will not here enter.

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When that decision was once made, I gave no further thought to the rights or wrongs of the matter, but dismissing every such consideration from my mind I concentrated all my energies upon the task of finding Captain Shannon.

And first, I decided to pay a visit to South-end to see if the little brown cutter was still there, and if not, to discover what had become of it.

As one walks down the High Street from the station, the pier lies directly in front, running out a mile and a quarter to sea on its myriad slender feet like a giant centipede. To the right are the shady shrubberies and sunny grass-crowned cliffs of New Southend, and to the left, with lips stooped to the water's edge, the Old Town straggles away seaward, a long line of picturesque irregular buildings — some cheerful red, others warm yellow, and a few cool gray — reminding one not a little of some quaint French or Belgian port blinking in the morning sunshine.

And oh! such skies! such cloud-pomp and pageantry, and, above all, such sunrises and sunsets! Such dance and sparkle of moving water when the tide is in, and, more beautiful still,

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when the tide is out, such play of light and shadow, such wonderful wealth of colour on the marshy flats — here a patch of royal purple or opalescent green, there a rose-gray or pearly-pink, with little shining pools changing from blue to silver and silver to blue with the passing of every cloud.

Southend is a pretty spot at any time, but after a month spent on a sick bed in a stuffy London side-street, the view from the pier-hill seemed to me exceptionally beautiful.

As I stood there drinking my fill of the sweet, strong, brackish air, and basking in the sunshine, I was conscious of being scrutinised quietly but very keenly by a man who was lounging near the Royal Hotel.

There was nothing in his appearance or dress — white flannel trousers and shirt, cricketing blazer and straw hat — to distinguish him from the hundreds of holiday makers in like attire who are to be seen in and about Southend during the season, but I recognised him at once, and with some alarm, as one of the cleverest officers of the detective force, and one, moreover, who had been specially told off to effect the capture of Mullen.

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In detective stories, as in pantomimes — no doubt for the same reason — the policeman is too often held up to scorn and ridicule as an incompetent bungler who is more dangerous to the hearts of susceptible servant girls than to law-breakers, and more given to deeds of prowess in connection with the contents of the pantry than in protecting the lives or properties of her Majesty's subjects. The hero of the detective story is very often a brilliant amateur, of whom the police are secretly jealous, notwithstanding the fact that whenever they have a difficult case they come, hat in hand, to seek his assistance. This, after a little light banter for the benefit of the Boswell who is to chronicle his marvellous doings — and in the course of which, by-the-bye, the fact that the police are about to arrest the wrong man is not unfrequently elicited — he condescends to give, the understanding between him and them being that he shall do the work and they take the credit.

Why the amateur detective should be the victim of a modesty which is not always characteristic of the amateur in other professions does not transpire, but the arrangement is extremely convenient to the policeman and to the author,

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the latter probably adopting it lest inquisitive readers should ask why, if there are such brilliant amateur detectives as authors would have us to believe, we never hear of them in real life.

Now I should be the last man in the world to cheapen the work of my fellow-craftsmen. I hold that there is no more unmistakable mark of a mean mind than is evinced in the desire to extol oneself at the expense of others, but none the less I must enter my protest against what I cannot but consider an unwarrantable imputation upon a very deserving body of men.

Detectives and policemen, taken as a whole, are by no means the bunglers and boobies that they are made out to be in the pantomimes and in the pages of detective stories. I do not say that they are all born geniuses in the detection of crime, for genius is no commoner among detectives than it is among bakers, bankers, clergymen, novelists, barristers, or cooks. But what I do say is that the rank and file of them are painstaking and intelligent men, who do their duty to the public conscientiously and efficiently; and to dub them all duffers, because

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now and then a detective is caught napping, is as unjust as to pronounce all clergymen fools because a silly sermon is sometimes preached from a pulpit.

I had managed to get ahead of the police in the investigation I was conducting, not because of the shining abilities with which I was endowed, for as the reader knows I had bungled matters sadly on more than one occasion, but because Fate had thrown a clue in my way at the start. But I have never underrated the acuteness and astuteness of the representatives of the Criminal Department from New Scotland Yard, and it did not greatly surprise me to find, when I commenced operations again at Southend, that though the little brown cutter was still lying off the same spot, she was being closely watched by men whom I knew to be detectives.

Whether they had discovered the relationship between Mullen and the owner of the "Odd Trick," and in following up the clue had traced the boat to Southend, or whether they were in possession of information unknown to me which led them to believe the fugitive had been hiding in the neighbourhood, I could not say; but that they were there to effect the capture of Mullen,

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should he return to the cutter, I made no doubt.

Mullen, however, was apparently too wary a bird to come back to the nest until he had satisfied himself that no net had been spread there to catch him, for that he had got wind of what was going on at Southend seemed probable from the fact that he never put in an appearance there again. Nor would it have profited me personally if he had, for in that case I could scarcely hope to forestall the police in the matter of his arrest.

Under the circumstances it would be mere waste of time to stay in Southend, and the question I had now to ask myself was, "Where, then, is he likely to be?"

As crime begets crime, so question begets question, and "Where, then, is he likely to be?" had scarcely come to the birth before it was itself in travail with, "Why not on the 'Cuban Queen'?"

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CHAPTER XXVII

I PLAY A GAME OF "BLUFF" WITH HUGHES

"WHY not on the 'Cuban Queen' indeed?" I repeated, as I called to mind the fact that it was there Mullen had lain secure when the hue and cry were at their height. It was only when the hue and cry had somewhat subsided that he had ventured forth to commence his devilry afresh; and what was more likely, now that the hue and cry had been raised once more, than that he should have crept back to his former hiding-place?

The next afternoon I was in the little cottage at Canvey again, and should have been there sooner but for the fact that I wished first to satisfy myself that my movements were not being watched by the police.

I did not intend on this occasion to waste time in trying to find out whether Hughes had any one on board with him or not, especially as I was now without Quickly's assistance. This

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was a case in which it seemed to me safer to achieve my purpose by a bold stroke than to adopt the more cautious course of beating about the bush. The thing to do would be to engage Hughes in conversation, and when he was off his guard to charge him suddenly with sheltering a fugitive from justice on board the "Cuban Queen." The cleverest rogue is apt to betray himself when a surprise is thus sprung upon him, and such a clumsy rascal as Hughes should not be difficult to deal with. I did not doubt that he would deny the impeachment with much bluster and more bad language, but by keeping a keen eye upon his face when playing my game of "bluff" I hoped to be able to come to some definite conclusion in regard to the theory I had formed concerning Mullen's whereabouts.

But I had yet to catch the hare which I felt so competent to cook, and of the two tasks the former promised to be the more difficult. Hughes, as the reader already knows, did not often leave the hulk, and as it was quite out of the question that I should seek him there, some plan for making it necessary for him to come ashore must be devised. After much brain-cudgelling I hit upon an idea which I immedi-

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ately proceeded to carry out. The oil which was burned in Hughes' cabin was taken out to him every Monday and Thursday by the attendant whose duty it was to fetch and carry for the caretakers of the hulks. I knew that it was so as the man had to pass my door on his way to the boat, and I had seen the tin can in his hand repeatedly. As a matter of fact, I was at that moment reminded of the matter, for the day was Thursday, and the man in question was just going by my gate, carrying the can in one hand and a small sack of potatoes in the other. If I did not avail myself of this opportunity I should have to wait until the following Monday before taking action, so I at once opened the door and hailed him.

"I want you to do a little commission for me," I said. "You 'll be going down to the village some time to-day, I know. Could you leave a letter to Mr. Hayes at the vicarage?"

"Yes, sir," he said civilly; "with pleasure."

"That 's right. Put that sack and the can down and come into the other room while I scribble the letter. I daresay I can find you a glass of grog in there and a cut of cold beef if you feel like having a mouthful."

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"Thank you, sir," he said, unburdening himself of his load and following me into the inner room. I had not finished my own breakfast very long, and a small joint was still on the table.

"Pull up and help yourself," I said, producing knife and fork. "What 'll you have to drink? I 've got some old rum. How 'll that suit you?"

"Capital, sir," he replied.

"All right. It 's in the other room, I think. I 'll be back in a moment. You make a start, meanwhile, on the cold beef."

No sooner was I in the other room with the closed door between us than I whipped out the cork from the paraffin can, and seizing a siphon of soda-water that stood upon the table — it was the only liquid handy — I slipped the spout into the mouth of the can and pressed the tap.

"If this is n't pouring oil on the troubled waters it 's at least pouring troubled waters on the oil," I said to myself, when half a tumbler of soda had hissed into the can. "There 'll be some rosy language about when Hughes goes to light his lamp after filling it up with this stuff, for he 'll never get it to light, much less

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to burn. And if he does n't make the discovery too early the man who looks after his requirements will be gone, and Master Hughes will have to sit in the dark and go to bed with his supper uncooked, or come into Canvey and get some more oil. He *may*, of course, get filling up his cooking stove in the daytime, and find the oil won't burn, or he may have enough left in it to carry him through. But anyhow, if the thing does n't work out as I hope, there will be no harm done, for at the worst they can only suppose that some water has accidentally got into the can."

The thing *did* work out as I had hoped, however, for as night was beginning to close in I saw Hughes unlashing the dinghy as if to come ashore, and judging from the sounds which broke the evening stillness I had reason to believe that he was at his old habit of swearing aloud to himself. This is a habit which is more soothing to the swearer than to an enforced listener, especially when the swearer is rowing a heavy boat against the tide, and jerks out a fresh and aggressively emphasised oath with each expulsion of breath. On this

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occasion the hopes which were expressed about the soul, eyes, limbs, and internal organs of every one who had been connected with the offending oil, beginning with the individual who "struck" it, and finishing off with the shopkeeper who sold it, and the man who brought it to the hulks, were distinctly uncharitable.

Nor did Hughes confine himself to human beings, for the unfortunate can in which the oil had been carried and the various matches which had been struck in his unavailing efforts to light the lamp were with strict impartiality similarly banned.

"Oil!" he growled as he ran the boat ashore. "I 'll oil 'im and the man wot sold it too!" (More hopes in regard to the soul, eyes, limbs, and internal organs of the offender.) "A pretty fine fool 'e made o' me, standin' there burnin' my fingers and a box of matches trying to find out what was wrong. Oil! Call that spluttering' stuff oil! Why, I might as well 'ave tried to set fire to the river."

Still swearing, he made fast the dinghy and proceeded, can in hand, in the direction of the village.

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After a time I started to follow, and overtook him just as he was passing my cottage.

"Good-night," I called out over my shoulder in passing, as is the custom in the country.

He replied by bidding me go to a place which, though it may likely enough have been his ultimate destination, I sincerely hope may never be mine nor the reader's.

"I 'm sure I know that dulcet voice," I said, stopping and wheeling round. "It must be, it *is*, the genial Hughes. How are you, my worthy fellow?"

The worthy fellow intimated that his health was not noticeably affected for the better by the sight of me.

"Oh, don't say that," I said. "You were most hospitable to me in the matter of drinks when I had the pleasure of spending a very delightful hour in your company on board the 'Cuban Queen' one evening. Pray let me return the compliment. This is my cottage, and I 've got some excellent whisky aboard. Won't you come in and have a glass?"

This was a temptation not to be withstood, and he replied a little more civilly that he "did n't mind," and even unbent so far as to

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answer Yes or No to one or two casual remarks I made.

When he rose to go, some spirit of mischief prompted me to ask him what he had in the oilcan, and this, apparently recalling his grievance, put him in the worst of tempers again, for he snatched at it, savagely blurting out, —

"What the dickens 'as that got to do with you?"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, you scoundrel!" I said sharply, taking a step towards him. "Answer me like that again, and I 'll give you a lesson you won't forget!"

"*You*, yer bloomin' monkey!" he snarled, spitting on the ground in front of me as an outward and visible sign of his contempt. "*You* give me a lesson! And where should I be, do yer think?"

I looked him full in the face and shot my bolt.

"You would be in prison, my good fellow, for harbouring a murderer, disguised as a woman, and you 'd be charged with being an accessory after the fact."

He stepped back, paling visibly under his

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bronze complexion, and answered, for once, without an oath.

"'E ain't a murderer. 'E's a private soldier wot struck 'is superior officer for comin' between 'im and 'is wife, and then deserted. I see it myself in the paper 'e showed me, and I 'd 'a done the same if I 'd bin in 'is place. And so 'd you, Mister."

"Ho, ho! my friend," I said to myself. "I was a 'monkey' a moment ago — now I 'm a 'Mister.' So you are funking it already, are you?"

And then, aloud, —

"Do you think any jury will believe that you thought a private soldier could afford to pay you what that man's paying? Now, look here! I 've got the whip hand of you, but I don't wish you any harm, personally. If you 'll do exactly as I tell you, and play me fair, I 'll pay you the sum that yonder man 's paying you, and you sha'n't get into any trouble if I can help it."

"Wot d' yer want me to do?" he asked.

"Answer me one question first. Supposing I were to arrange to take your place on the 'Cuban Queen' for a couple of days. In that case the man who waits on the hulks would

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have to be squared to keep his mouth shut. Could that be done?"

"P'raps. 'E ain't the inspector. 'E's paid to wait on us, so as we don't 'ave to leave the 'ulks. 'T ain't 'is business to look after what we do. P'raps 'e might if it wos worth 'is while."

"Very well. I'll give you the money to-night to square him, and some on account for yourself as well. And now another question. Where does your wife live?"

"Mill Lane, Chelmsford."

"That 's all right. When you get back to the 'Cuban Queen' you 'll get a telegram from Chelmsford to say she 's dying, and that you must go to her. You must show that to the man you 've got aboard. What do you call him by-the-bye?"

"Winton."

"Well, you must show the telegram to Winton, and tell him you intend applying for leave, and that he must go somewhere else in the meantime. He won't want to leave the only safe hiding-place he 's got, and he 'll try and persuade you not to go, and will perhaps offer you a big money bribe to stay. You must

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persist in going; but after a time you must say that you have a brother at Southend who could come and take your place while you are away, and that you are sure he 'd keep his mouth shut if he were well paid. Winton will *have* to consent if you persist. Then you 'll send a telegram to me, as if I were your brother, asking me to come over to see you; and when I come you 'll show me the telegram and ask me to take charge of the hulk while you go away to see your wife. I shall come at night, so as not to be seen, and shall pretend to agree, and then you can go ashore and put up at my cottage here until I signal you to return. Do as I tell you, and play me fair, and I 'll give you fifty pounds for yourself when it 's all over. What do you say?"

"Can't be done," he answered sullenly.

"Why not?"

"'Cos it can't."

"Very well. Good-night, then. I 'm going straight from this house to the coastguard station, and shall send two armed men out to the hulk to arrest the murderer you 've been harbouring, and two more to arrest you — you can't get far away in the meantime — for harbouring

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him and for being an accessory after the fact. I suppose you know what the punishment for that is? And when you come out you 'll be a ruined man. The hulk-owners will discharge you without a character for gross violation of rules."

He looked murder, and had he been less of a coward might have attempted as well as looked it. Then something seemed to occur to him, and he stood staring absently at me while turning the matter over in his bovine brain. I guessed the upshot of his meditations to be somewhat as follows: "This man, whoever he is, has me in his power and can ruin me. I wish he were out of the way, but I don't mean risking my own neck for him. If I let him go on the hulk Winton is more than likely to suspect he 's a spy. In that case he 's just the sort of man to knock the meddling fool on the head, and the job I want done would get done without my putting my neck in a noose."

Anyhow, he looked at me curiously for a minute, and then said, in a more conciliatory tone, —

"What are you going to do to Winton?"

"Arrest him by-and-bye. If I can I 'll keep

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your name out of it. If I can't, and you lose your crib, I 'll make it up to you in some way. But let me tell you one thing: you 'd better play me fair, or it will be the worse for you. The "Cuban Queen" is being watched night and day, and if you tell Winton of your meeting with me, and he tries to escape or you try to give us the slip yourself, you 'll be instantly arrested, and it will go hard with you then. Play me fair and I 'll play you fair, and no harm need come to you at all in the matter. Once more, will you come to my terms? If not, I 'm off to the coastguard station. There 's only one policeman in Canvey, and I shall want two or three men — armed men — for Winton, and the same for you. I mean business, I can tell you. Come, is it Yes or No?"

"Yes," he answered, with a horrible oath. And then we sat down to arrange the details of our little conspiracy.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

I BOARD THE "CUBAN QUEEN" FOR THE SECOND TIME.

BUT when you had satisfied yourself that there *was* a man in hiding on the 'Cuban Queen,'" says the reader, "and when you had every reason for suspecting that man to be Mullen, why not at once arrest him? Why go to work like Tom Sawyer in 'Huckleberry Finn,' who, when he wished to rescue Jim the nigger from the woodshed, must needs make a seven days' job of it, and dig the poor wretch out, when it would have been an easy matter to abstract the key and let him out through the door?"

Why? Well, for several reasons, one of which is that the story would then have been shorter and perhaps less interesting. Another is that, though it is true I had good cause to suppose the man in hiding to be James Mullen, I had no actual proof of his identity.

The reader must remember that I had seen him but twice in my life. The first time was

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in the train, going down to Southend, when my only cause for suspecting him to be Mullen was a fancied likeness to the published portrait. The second was on the day of the explosion at the Post Office, and on that occasion he had been cleverly disguised, and we had not come to close quarters until after dark, when the difficulty of identification is greatly increased.

Were I, as matters then stood, to give information to the police, I could only claim to be the means of accomplishing his arrest, whereas, if I could once obtain satisfactory proof of his identity my chain of evidence would be complete, and now that I had spent so much time, thought and money on the enterprise, I preferred to carry it through myself rather than hand it over to some one else at the last moment.

By taking Hughes' place upon the "Cuban Queen" I hoped to obtain the necessary evidence, and once such evidence was in my possession, I should lose no time in effecting an arrest.

The morning after my interview with Hughes I took train to Chelmsford, and thence despatched the pretended telegram from his wife. When I got back to Southend, the telegram

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which Hughes was to send to his supposed brother was waiting for me at the address we had arranged between us. Lest the police should be tampering with letters and telegrams, I had arranged that Hughes' message should contain nothing more than a request that Bill Hughes would come over to see his brother Jim at Canvey.

To Canvey I accordingly went, calling first at my cottage, where I arrayed myself in a well-worn suit of waterman's clothes, which I had kept there all along lest I should at any time have to assume a disguise. My next procedure was to shave off the beard which I had been wearing on the night of the explosion at the Post Office. The fact that the night had been very dark was against Mullen's knowing me again, for though the bursting of the bomb had lit up the whole neighbourhood, the street in which our encounter had taken place was entirely in shadow, owing to the height of the buildings on either side.

That it was quite possible he would recognise me, if only by my voice, I fully realised, and I knew perfectly well that every moment I spent in his company my life would be in my own

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hands; but I flattered myself that I was more than a match for him in a fair fight, and in regard to foul play, — well, forewarned is forearmed, and I was not unprepared.

I waited until it was dark before starting for the hulk. Hughes came on deck in reply to my hail, and proved a better actor than might have been expected. After he had inquired gruffly, "Is that you, Bill?" and I had responded, "Bill it is, Jim," and had been bidden come aboard, he went on — in response to my question of "Wot 's up?" — to speak his part in the little play which we had rehearsed together. He informed me he had had a telegram to say that his wife was ill, and that he wished to go to her, but did not like applying for relief because he had a cove on board, disguised as a woman (this in a lowered voice, according to instruction), who had got into a scrape and wanted to lie low awhile.

My supposed brother then went on to ask me if I would take charge of the hulk in his absence, assuring me that the cove was "a good un to pay," and that the job would be worth a five-pound note if I promised to keep my mouth shut.

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To all this Mullen was no doubt listening, so I replied — emphasising my remark with the expectoration and expletives which might be looked for from a seafaring man — that I was ready to take over the job and keep my own counsel. That point being satisfactorily settled, I was invited to step below and make the acquaintance of the gentleman in the cabin.

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CHAPTER XXIX

I TRY A FALL WITH JAMES MULLEN

SOME one dressed like a woman was standing by the stove whistling softly to himself while paring his nails with a pearl-handled knife.

"My brother Bill, sir," said Hughes gruffly, and I thought rather nervously, indicating me with the peaked cloth cap which he carried, rolled scrollwise, in his hand.

I followed suit with a bow, or rather a duck, and a polite "Good-evening, sir," but Mullen continued his nail-pairing and whistling without deigning to look up.

For about a quarter of a minute I stood there feeling, and perhaps looking, rather foolish. Then Hughes said again, and this time rather louder, "My brother, sir."

"There, there, my good fellow, that will do! I have n't become deaf! I hear you," Mullen answered, without raising his head.

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He spoke very much in the manner affected by some curates. Each syllable was carefully pronounced and fell as cleanly cut as if it had been new pennies which his lips were coining. The aspirates, the "hear" and "there's," he discharged at us as if his mouth had been a tiny popgun, and he roared at us gently as any sucking dove with the cooing sound in such words as "do."

But for all his nicety of speech he had too much of what is commonly called "side" in his manner to delude any one into the idea that he was a gentleman.

There is in the bearing of your true aristocrat towards strangers a certain suave and urbane *hauteur* — as of one who expects and, if need be, will *exact* the courtesy he is accustomed to *accord* — which the man of no breeding thinks can be imitated by the assumption of "side."

Without his "side" he *might* conceivably have passed for a gentleman. As it is, he as surely betrays himself for what he is, as the man who, by manifesting that over-anxiety to please — which he mistakes for the easy courtesy of well-bred intercourse — betrays his underbreeding.

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Neither Hughes nor I made any reply to what Mullen had said — nor did the latter seem to expect us to do so, for he looked critically at his little finger, felt the nail with the tip of his thumb, put the finger to his teeth, nibbled at it for an instant, and then began scraping the nail edge very gingerly.

Chafed at his insolence as I was, I could not help noticing that his hands were small, white, and beautifully shaped, with the long taper fingers of the artist, and pink carefully-trimmed nails.

When he had quite finished, he closed the knife deliberately and put it on a little shelf by the bunk, then darting a sudden sideways glance at me, he inquired sharply, almost viciously, "Well, sir, and what have you to say for yourself?"

It was the first time he had looked at me since I had entered the cabin, and as I met his eye it seemed to me that he started perceptibly, and that I saw a sudden dilatation of the pupil which gave a look of consternation if not of fear to his face. The next moment he turned from me and flashed at Hughes a look of such malignity that I fully expected to see the look

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succeeded by a blow — a look which, if I read it aright, was the portent of a terrible vengeance to the man who had played him false.

I am almost ashamed to write what followed. Not for the first time in my life — not for the first time in this enterprise — I acted as only one could act who was possessed by some spirit of mischief for his own undoing. Even to myself the impulse which comes over me at times to play the fool — to say or do at the critical moment the one word or thing which ought to be left unsaid or undone, is altogether unaccountable.

This uncertainty of character, this tendency to lose my head and to bring tumbling about my ears, by the utterance of a word, the entire edifice which I have perhaps spent laborious months in building up, has been my stumbling-block through life, and must inevitably stand in the way of my ever becoming a good detective. But a good detective I have, as the reader knows, never claimed to be. Were it so, I should undoubtedly suppress the incident I am about to relate, for it tells very much against myself without in any way strengthening the probability of my story.

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When the man in hiding on the "Cuban Queen" lifted his head and looked me in the face, I knew at once that I was in the presence, if nôt of James Mullen, at all events of the person with whom I had travelled to Southend on the occasion when he had objected so forcibly to the striking of a fusee. The bright prominent eyes, beautiful as a woman's, the delicately clear complexion, the straw-coloured hair, the aquiline nose with the strange upward arching of the nostrils, the curious knitting of the brows over the eyes, the full lips that spoke of voluptuousness unscrupulous and cruel, the firm, finely-moulded chin — all these there was no mistaking, in spite of his woman's dress. As I looked at him the scene in the stuffy smoking carriage on the Southend railway came back to me, and when in his quick, incisive way he asked, "Well, sir, and what have you to say for yourself?" I stammered foolishly for a moment, and then, prompted by what spirit of perversity and mischief I know not, answered him by another question, which under the circumstances must have sounded like intentional insolence.

"You 're the man wot could n't stand the smell of fusees?"

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Had horns suddenly sprouted out on each side of my head he could not have looked at me with more absolute amazement and dismay. For a very few seconds he stared wide-eyed with wonder, and then a look of comprehension and cunning crept into his eyes. They narrowed cat-like and cruel, the muscles about the cheeks tightened, the lips parted, showing the clenched teeth, I heard his breath coming and going like that of a winded runner, and the next second his face flamed out with a look of such devilish ferocity and uncontrollable fury as I pray God I may never see on face of man again.

With a howl of hatred more horrible than that of any tiger — for no wild beast is half so hellish in its cruelty as your human tiger — he sprang at me, beating at my face, now with closed fist, now open-handed and with clutching, tearing nails, kicking with his feet, biting and snapping at my hands and throat like a dog, and screaming like a very madman.

To this day it consoles me not a little for the lapse of self-possession which I had just before manifested to think that I never lost presence of mind during this onslaught. When he came at me, my one thought was to see that he made

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use of no weapons. His wild-cat clawing and scratching it was no difficult matter for any one with a quick eye and cool head to ward off; but when I saw him clap his hand to his hip, where, had he been wearing male clothing, a pistol or knife might well have lain, the eye I kept upon him was, I promise you, a keen one.

Finding no pocket at his hips reminded him no doubt of his woman's dress, for his hand slipped down to the side of his skirt, where it floundered about as helplessly as a fish out of water.

A woman's pocket is, to the degenerate male mind, a fearful and wonderful piece of mechanism. The intention of the designer was apparently to offer special inducements to pickpockets, and so to construct the opening that the contents should either fall out altogether and be lost, or should be swallowed up by dark and mysterious depths into which no male hand dare venture to penetrate. The only way to get at anything which happens to be wanted seems to be to haul the entire pocket to the surface, very much as a fishing-net is hauled from the depths of the sea, and to turn it inside out in search of the missing article.

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On the occasion in question, Mullen was in too much of a hurry to adopt this course, and, but for the seriousness of the situation, I could have smiled, as I held him at arm's length, to see him diving and fumbling among those unplumbed depths. When at last he rose, so to speak, gasping, to the surface, his hand was clutching a pistol-barrel, but the butt had in some way caught the lining of the dress, and in order to extricate it he had to turn the entire pocket inside out. In doing so, a folded paper fell, unseen by him, to the floor, and this I determined at all costs to secure.

Before he could raise his arm to use the pistol, I laid a hand of iron upon his. As I gripped the fingers which were grasping the butt they scrunched sickeningly and relaxed their hold of the pistol, which I wrenched away and tossed upon the bunk. Then I closed with him that we might try a fall together. Twisting my heel behind his ankle I jerked him backwards and had him off his legs in a jiffy. We fell to the floor — he under and I above — with a crash, and as we did so my hand closed over the paper, to secure which I had thrown him.

Crumpling it up in a ball I made as if to rise

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to a sitting posture, and in doing so managed to slip it into a side pocket. The next moment I found myself pulled over on my back by Hughes, who asked excitedly if we were both mad that we thus courted inquiry by fighting like a couple of wild cats. If the sound of scuffling or firing were heard to come from the hulk an alarm would, he said, be raised, the coast-guardsmen would row out to discover the cause, and everything would be lost, as Mullen and I would be called upon to give an account of ourselves, and he (Hughes) would forfeit his post.

Mullen was evidently of the same opinion, for though he was livid to the lips, and was trembling with hate and rage until his teeth chinked in his head like a carelessly-carried tray of china, he gave no sign of wishing to continue the contest.

Nor was I inclined to shut my eyes to the wisdom of Hughes' counsel, for I was already conscious of the fact that by taunting Mullen and provoking him to blows I was doing my best to spoil my own game. There was all the difference in the world between his presence on board the hulk being discovered by the police as a result of a brawl, and his being arrested on

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information given by me and supported by proof of his identity.

Mullen was the first to speak. He was now no doubt convinced that he had not acted with his customary discretion, for he had even stronger reasons than I to wish to avoid a visit from the police. So long as it was a question of brains he might hope to hold his own, but let him once fall into their hands and they would hold him by the brute force of number, whereas in me he was pitted against a single foe whom it might not be difficult to outwit.

"I beg your pardon for what happened just now," he said, "but before we go any further tell me where and when I have seen you before."

"I saw you in the Southend train once. You 'ad a row with a bloke wot stunk the carriage out with a fusee," I answered, doing my best to sustain the *rôle* I had assumed.

"Ah!" he said, looking very much relieved and with a wonderfully pleasant smile, "that explains everything. To tell the honest truth, my good man, I knew I had seen you before, the moment I set eyes on you, and the fact is I thought you were a detective who has been

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hunting me down for a long time, and who has played me one or two tricks too dirty and too cowardly even for a detective to play, and for which one day I mean to be even with him."

He was smiling still, but the smile seemed to have shifted from his eyes to his teeth, and the effect had ceased to be pleasant. He swung himself round and away from me, and, with hands clasped behind him and bent head, commenced pacing backward and forward — evidently deep in thought — in the scanty space the cabin afforded.

Five minutes went by in silence, and then he began to mutter to himself in a low voice, turning his head from side to side every now and then in a quick, nervous, birdlike way, his eyes never still a moment, but pouncing restlessly first on one object and then on another.

"What's come to me," he said to himself, and there was a look on his face which I have never seen except on the face of a madman — as, indeed, I am now fully persuaded he was. "What's come to me that I of all men in the world should so forget myself as to behave — and before two louts — like a drunken, screeching, hysterical Jezebel?"

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He stopped his restless pacing for a moment, and it seemed to me that the man was writhing under his self-contempt, as if every word had been a lash cutting ribbons of flesh from his bare back. Once more he fell to walking to and fro and holding converse with himself.

"Is the end coming, that I can break down like this?" he asked. "No, no, it's this being hunted down day and night, until I get to start at my own shadow, that has made me nervous and overwrought.

"Nervous! Overwrought! My God! who would n't be so who has led the life I've led these last six months — hearing in the daytime the step of the officer who has come to arrest me in every sound, and lying wide-eyed and awake the whole night through rather than trust myself to the sleep which brings always the same hideous dream, from which I awake screaming and with the cold sweat running off me like water!"

It was a magnificent piece of acting, if acting it were, and there was a pathetic break in his voice at the last which, had he not been what he was, would have made me pity him.

But James Mullen, *alias* Captain Shannon,

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was scarcely an object for pity, as I was soon reminded, for as he looked up my eye met his, and he read there, I suppose, something of what was passing through my mind. To such a man's vanity the mere thought of being considered a possible object for pity is unendurable. It implies a consciousness of superiority on the part of the pitier which is resented more fiercely than an insult or a wrong. For one moment I thought that he was about to attack me again — not this time with tooth and nail, after the manner of a wild cat or a hysterical woman, but with a heavy three-legged stool which was lying upon the bunk, tossed there, I suppose, by Hughes to be out of the way while he was clearing up.

Mullen turned the edge of a glance toward it without taking his eyes from mine, and I saw his hand flutter up hesitatingly for a moment like a startled bird, and then drop dead to his side, and I knew that he was thinking how dearly, if he dared, he would love to beat the stool again and again against my face until he had bashed every feature out of recognition. But on this occasion he managed to keep his self-control, and contented himself by asking

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me, with savage irritability, what I was waiting for, and what I saw strange in him that I stood staring in that way.

I replied that I was only waiting to know whether he had anything else to say to me or my brother before the latter left the hulk.

He did not answer except to snap out, "You can go," to Hughes, but when, after a surly "Good night both," that worthy had taken his departure, Mullen turned to me again.

"Now listen. I 'm a dangerous man to trifle with, and a desperate one, and there are not many things I 'd stick at to be level with the man who played me false. But I can be a good friend to those who play me fair, as well as a relentless enemy. Act squarely by me while you are here, and keep your mouth shut when you leave, and you 'll never have cause to regret it. But if you play tricks here, or blab when you 're gone, you 'll do the worst day's work for yourself you ever did in your life. Do you understand?"

He waited for a reply, so I nodded and said, "Fair do is fair do, guv'nor. That 's all right."

"Very well," he continued; "now we understand each other, and no more need be said

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about it. I shall sleep in the hold as I 've done before, for if any one came out to the hulk for any reason it would n't do for them to see me. You 'll take your nap here as your brother did. So I bid you good-night."

" Good-night, sir," I answered civilly, holding the door open for him.

" Now I 'll have a look at the paper that fell out of your pocket in the tussle, my friend," I added, as soon as he was out of hearing. " I 've got all the night before me; for I don't intend to take the nap of which you were speaking until I 've got you safe in custody — otherwise it might be a nap to which there would come no waking."

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CHAPTER XXX

MORE DEVILRY

THERE was no fastening to the door of my cabin, but on passing my hand over the place where a fastening might have been expected, a flake of soft substance caught in my finger-nail and dropped to the floor. This, when I picked it up, proved to be a pellet of bread kneaded to the consistency of putty or dough. Taking the swing lamp from its bracket I examined the door more closely and saw that there had once been a fastening of some sort. A closer examination convinced me that the person who had removed the fastening had been to the pains of plugging the empty screw-holes with kneaded bread, after which he had apparently rubbed dirt-smeared fingers over the place where the fastening had been, in order to hide the marks left by removal.

When I picked out the bread-plugs — which had only recently been put in, as they were still

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damp — I saw that the screw-holes were clean inside, although there were tiny rings of dirt on the outside where the roughened edges had brushed against the fingers and collected whatever it was which had been smeared upon them.

Very softly I opened the door and looked at the other side, where, as I expected, I found a bolt. A moment's examination satisfied me that it was the very bolt which had been on the inside, and that it had only recently been placed where it was.

"There is some devilry in this," I said to myself. "Even if the bolt had not been recently changed I should strongly object to be anywhere where Mullen could fasten me in if he had a mind to. I shall have to take out these screws one by one with my penknife and make each hole so large that the screws don't bite. Then I'll replace them, and the whole concern will look as it was before; but if Mullen should fasten me in, one good kick will fetch the bolt off and let me out."

The job was tedious and lengthy, for I had to work in silence and with a penknife in place of a screw-driver. But I got through it at last,

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and having barricaded the door from the inside as best I could, I pulled out the paper which had fallen from Mullen's pocket.

A glance was sufficient to satisfy me that my find was no less than the latter part of another manifesto, printed like previous manifestoes in rude capitals, and bearing the well-known signature —

"BY ORDER,
"CAPTAIN SHANNON."

It was evidently an attempt to stir up, for his own ends and purposes, the disloyalty of the discontented Irish, and by professing to champion their cause, to enlist their sympathy and co-operation in the war which was being waged against England. Here is the document itself: —

"If England have annexed Ireland because she is smaller and lies near, then might France with equal justice annex England, for Ireland lies no nearer to England than England to France.

"Ireland is no mere pendant to England, like Anglesea or the Isle of Wight; she is a separate and different country, scarcely smaller in size, complete in herself, and peopled by a nation of different creed, different temperament, and different race.

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"The Celt shall not be ruled by the Teuton, nor the Teuton by the Celt.

"God gave Ireland her independence when he cut her off from England and separated the two countries by dividing seas.

"And they whom God has set asunder let no man join.

"But you have joined us to yourself in the union of bondage and oppression, and when we cry out under our bondage — a bondage which, were the cases reversed, England would be as little ready to tolerate as Ireland — how do you meet our righteous demands?

"By trying to humour us as a woman seeks to humour a troublesome child to whom she tosses a toy. By sending us what you dare not insult the Scotch by sending to Scotland — a sawdust figure, of which you hold the strings, who is to play at being king and holding court to please us. But we — ah God! was ever so unreasonable a people? — we do not simper and dance to the fiddling of this dummy king who is not even of our own choosing, for we are ungracious enough to remember that we have in our midst men of older lineage and nobler blood than he.

"And then you cast about in your mind for some other means by which you can make us loyal under subjection. And when there is born to that 'Queen of Ireland' whom Ireland never sees — though she can journey far afield to southern France or Italy—

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another princeling, for whom royal provision must be made out of the pockets of the people, who can scarce find their own children in bread, you say, 'Go to, here is our opportunity; we will make Ireland loyal for ever by giving this princeling Patrick as one of his many names and by dubbing him Duke of Connaught.'

"But Ireland, graceless, thankless, stubborn Ireland, is not one whit more loyal after receiving this royal boon, for she knows that you rule over her by the coward's right — the right of the strong to oppress and make subject the weak.

"You call her your sister while you seek to make her your slave, even as you call Irishmen your brothers while you have sought to make their very name a reproach and a fitting subject for your sorry jests.

"You hold Ireland in the thrall of cruel oppression — for cowardice is always cruel — not because of any sisterly feeling for her or love for her people, whom you hate and who hate you with an undying hate, but because you *are afraid to let her go free.*

"But that which you fear shall assuredly come to pass, and Ireland, which might and would have been your friend and ally were she free, is but waiting till you are involved in war to prove herself your deadliest and bitterest enemy and the friend and ally of every country which calls itself your foe.

"By order.

"CAPTAIN SHANNON."

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No more convincing proof that the fugitive in hiding on the "Cuban Queen" was Captain Shannon could be wished for than this document, and the only question I had to consider was how best to accomplish his arrest.

I decided that the safest plan would be to signal Hughes to return. He could see the hulk from the top window of my cottage, and I had arranged with him that a red jersey (the men in charge of the hulks wear red jerseys not unlike those affected by the Salvationists) slung over the ship's side was to be taken as meaning, "Come back as soon as it is dark, and say that your wife is better."

His return would, of course, render my presence on the hulk unnecessary, and there would be nothing further for me to do but to receive whatever payment Mullen proposed to give me, wish him and my supposed brother good-bye and come ashore. Thence I should make straight for the coastguard station and inform the officer in charge that the notorious Captain Shannon was at that moment in hiding on the "Cuban Queen" disguised as a woman. The rest would be easy, for I had hit upon a plan by which, providing that I could count upon the

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necessary assistance at the proper moment, the fugitive could be secured without difficulty or danger, and I saw no reason why the newspaper placards of the morning after Hughes's return should not bear the startling announcement, "Arrest of Captain Shannon."

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CHAPTER XXXI

THE ARREST OF CAPTAIN SHANNON

SIX o'clock next morning saw the red jersey, which was to recall Hughes, slung over the ship's side, and the preconcerted reply signalled from the upper window of the cottage.

From then until nightfall I had to possess my soul in patience, and never in my life has time hung so heavily on my hands as on that eventful day.

Mullen, who had been up since daybreak, was watching the shipping with the liveliest interest. By standing on the steps of the cockpit he could, without being seen himself, get a distant view of every vessel that passed up or down the great waterway of the Thames.

He was inclined to be friendly, even talkative, and only once was there a recurrence of the irritability he had manifested on the previous evening. It happened in this wise.

Some fishing lines were in the cabin, and being badly in want of something to make the

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time pass, I baited them with shreds of raw herring, and threw them over the ship's side. I got a "bite" directly, but, on hauling up, found it came from a crab about as big as a five-shilling piece, whom I tenderly detached from the inhospitable hook and restored to his native element. I rebaited, sent the lead whizzing overboard, and again brought up a crab.

"Come to look for the other one, I suppose," I said to myself. "His wife, perhaps. I 'll treat her kindly," and crab number two rejoined its dear ones.

Again I rebaited, again there was a bite, and again a crab clawing wildly at the air appeared at the end of the line.

"H'm — a sister this time, or perhaps a daughter. Back she goes, however," and crab number three popped safely overboard, only to be succeeded by crab number four.

"These are Scotch crabs, I should think," I grumbled, "they 're so clannish;" but him too I sent on his way rejoicing. Then a fifth appeared on the scene.

"Oh, hang it all!" I growled. "I shall never get any fish if the crabs eat up my bait as fast as I put it on. I hoped that last was an

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orphan, but it seems as if I had struck another family gathering."

Crab number six added insult to injury by refusing to let go the bait, though I turned him over on his back and shook him till he rattled.

"Oh, I can't stand this," I said, raising a menacing heel. But more humane feeling prevailed, and once more I stooped to assist the pertinacious crustacean to his native deep. A nip from his foreclaws was all I got for my pains.

"Very well," I said, "if you *will* have it, you will."

Down came the heel, there was a sickening scrunch, and what had been a crab was a noisome mess.

Then I heard an exclamation of disgust behind me, and, looking guiltily round, saw that Mullen, who had hitherto been too absorbed in watching the shipping to interest himself in my fishing, had heard the scrunch of the crab's shell under my heel, and had turned to ascertain the cause.

"You brute!" he said. "Why could n't you throw the wretched thing back into the water?"

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"It ain't none of your business," I answered sulkily.

"It is my business, and every decent person's business. The thing never did you any harm. Besides, look at the ghastly mess you've made."

"Ain't you never killed nothin' wot done you no 'arm?" I asked, perhaps indiscreetly.

"Yes, if I had any reason to do so; just as I'd gladly put my heel on your ugly brute's head and crush the life out of you as you've crushed it out of that wretched crab, — but not from wanton destructiveness."

I did not think it wise to prolong an argument which touched upon such delicate and personal ground, so I continued my fishing in silence, and after another exclamation of disgust Mulien turned away to devote himself once more to the shipping.

Not a vessel went by that he did not scrutinise carefully, and I noticed that when any small steamer hove in sight he fidgeted restlessly until she was near enough to allow inspection. That he was on the look-out either for a ship or for a signal from a ship I felt sure; and I was inclined to think that the irritability he had

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just displayed was due more to nerve tension, and to his disappointment at not seeing the vessel for which he was watching, than to any other cause.

One thing seemed certain, however, — Mullen was breaking down under the strain, and was no longer the man he had been. This was very manifest later on in the day when a large steam yacht made her appearance at the mouth of the Thames. All his attention was at once riveted upon her, and as she crept up the river towards us I could see that he was becoming feverishly anxious.

"There 's a pair of field-glasses in the hold where I am sleeping," he said. "Would you mind getting them for me, like a good fellow? Some one might see me if I went myself. I want to have a look at yonder big liner going down the river. I fancy I sailed in her once."

I did as he requested, and he made a pretence of examining the liner. "Yes, it is she; I can read her name quite easily," he said, turning the glasses from the big ship to the steam yacht. His hand trembled so that he seemed unable at first to get the focus, and I distinctly

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saw the quick fluttering of his pulse in the veins of his wrist.

"What *is* her name?" I asked.

"'Fiona,'" he said absently, and then pulling himself up sharp, — "what am I thinking about? I mean the 'Walmer Castle,' of course. I sailed in her when I went to Peru."

I had all along expected that it was for his sister's boat "Fiona" that Mullen was watching, but hardly that he would tell me so himself; and that such a man — a man who had carried out his devilish plots as if his heart had been of cold stone and his nerves of iron — should so give himself away, as the phrase goes, was proof positive of his complete breakdown.

He watched the steam yacht until she was in front of us, though, of course, a considerable distance off, — and then, having apparently satisfied himself of her identity, he laid the glasses down with a sigh of relief and went below. As soon as he was out of sight I picked them up, levelled them at the now receding vessel, and saw, as I had expected, the word "Fiona" on her bow.

The plot was thickening, indeed, for it was

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no doubt by Mullen's directions that she had come to England (he had probably given instructions that she was to enter the Thames by daylight so that he might not miss her), and he would scarcely have sent for her until the fitting moment to make his escape had arrived. I had scarcely time to satisfy myself of the steam yacht's identity and to lay down the glasses before Mullen reappeared with a plentiful supply of bread and cheese, — of which he must have been sorely in need, for he had had no food since early morning. Every shadow of his nervousness was now gone, and he was in the best of spirits.

"Hughes, my boy," he said, slapping me on the shoulder boisterously, for I was sitting with my feet in the cockpit, "how are you getting on? And what are you going to do with all the fish you have caught, eh?"

I was in no humour to enter into conversation, and as I had caught no fish — as he very well knew — I pretended to take the last remark in high dudgeon, and gave him a sulky answer.

But the reaction from his former anxiety was so great, and so set was he upon drawing me into conversation, that in order to escape him

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I made an excuse about getting some tea and went below.

"That 's right; make yourself jolly, my good man. You 're going to do well out of this job, I can tell you," he said; "and as it 's beginning to get a bit dark, and I don't see any one about, I 'll go on deck to stretch my legs and get an airing."

He remained there until night had set in, and then he came into the cabin.

"I say," he said, "there 's a boat coming out to us. Who can it be, and at this time of the day?"

"Most likely it 's Jim come back," I answered gruffly. "'E said 'e 'd come soon as the missus was better."

"Of course," Mullen said pleasantly. "How foolish of me not to think of it. I 'm glad the poor fellow's wife 's better. But I shall be sorry to lose your entertaining companionship, my genial friend. *Can't* I persuade you to stay on and favour us with the pleasure of your company for a day or two longer, as my guest?"

"Guest be blowed!" I replied in my surliest tone. "If that 's Jim Hughes, the sooner I

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'as my money and gets ashore agen the better I 'll like it."

"I should be hurt if I thought you meant that," he said banteringly; "but I know you don't. We 've hit it off together charmingly, I 'm sure, notwithstanding the fact that I 'm so 'difficult' socially. And I 'd make such delightful plans for your comfort and amusement. It seems hard that we should have to part."

At that moment, and not a little to my relief, we heard a voice which was unmistakably. Hughes', for he was expressing, by means of a liberal use of his favourite adjective, the unwillingness with which he set eyes on "the old tub again."

"Well," said Mullen, when Hughes entered the cabin, "and how 's your wife?"

"Better," was the answer.

"Ah, that 's capital; I congratulate you, I 'm sure. So glad to see you back again. Except, of course, for the fact that we shall be deprived of your brother's company. He *is* your brother you said, did n't you? Though really one need hardly ask; the likeness, I 'm sure, is wonderful. But what a man it is, Hughes! Such geniality, such urbanity, such a flow of spirits,

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such a fund of information, and, above all, such manners!"

Hughes, who had probably never seen Mullen in this vein before, looked first at him and then at me in astonishment.

"Stow your jaw!" I said shortly. "If you're going to pay me for the job, pay me and let me go!"

"Certainly, certainly, my dear fellow," replied Mullen, smiling. "Yes, you and I *have* a little account to settle, have n't we? I 'll pay you, by all means. I always do pay my debts, and with interest. First, about the hulk."

He had been standing by the door all the time, but he now stepped forward and counted out ten sovereigns upon the table.

"Will that satisfy you and keep your mouth shut?" he said, stepping back again.

I nodded.

"Put them in your pocket, then, and that matter 's settled."

I stooped to pick up the coins, but as I did so Mullen suddenly pushed me with all his strength against Hughes, knocking the two of us backward upon the bunk.

In another second he had stepped out of the

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cabin, pulling the door to with a bang, and then we heard the rattle of the outside bolt in the socket.

Hughes hurled me off and sprang up with blazing eyes.

"Did you take the bolt off and put it outside?" he asked.

"No."

"Then *'e*'s done it, and 'e means mischief for both of us! The ——'s bad enough for anything. I know 'im; and 'ere we are caught like rats in a trap."

"That 's all right," I said, and hunching my shoulder to the door and making a pivot of my right foot, I burst the thing open with a crash, the screws starting from their sockets and pattering upon a locker opposite like spent bullets.

As I did so, Hughes rushed past me and upon the deck, I after him. Nor were we too soon, for Mullen was making, as Hughes had evidently feared, for the dynamite hold. When he heard our footsteps he turned, and whipping out a revolver, raised it and shot Hughes right through the heart. The unhappy man flung up his arms and toppled over the ship's side into

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the sea; but before Mullen could turn the weapon upon me I got in a blow straight from the shoulder, which took him well under the chin, and tumbled him backward to the bottom of the hold. I hit hard enough to have knocked him "silly," and I was not surprised that he lay for a minute or two like one dead. Then he tried to rise, but fell back with a groan, apparently quite helpless.

"Are you hurt?" I inquired, kneeling on one knee, the better to look down into the hold.

He glanced up with a feeble attempt at a smile upon features cruelly contorted by pain.

"So you 've won the rubber after all, although I 'd arranged everything so cleverly, as I thought. You and Hughes, once locked securely in the cabin, and a fuse put to the dynamite, I ought by now to have been half a mile off in the dinghy, and on my way to join my sister at Gravesend. We should have slipped off quietly in the confusion of the explosion, for no one would know that it did n't occur, as explosions have occurred before, through the carelessness of the man in charge. And you and Hughes, the only two people who could set matters right, would have gone to join the dead men, who tell no tales.

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Confess, now, was n't it a pretty plan, and worthy of an artist, friend Rissler?"

I started at the mention of my name, seeing which he burst into a mocking laugh.

"Is it possible? No, it can't be!" he said. "Don't, *don't* tell me that you did n't know I knew who you were. Why, you refreshing person, it was only because I did know that I pretended to fall into your booby trap. I only let you take Hughes' place on board the hulk that I might get you into my power and rid myself of the pair of you at a sweep. And to think that you did n't know that I knew! Why, man alive, I 've known all about you from the first, and I could have sent you to join Quickly and Green long ago if I had minded. But they were mere bunglers, fit only to put out of the way, just as one would tread upon a spider or beetle, — whereas you 're really clever, and ingenious, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, and you interested me. I don't say that if you had had any one you were very fond of, — a wife, sweetheart, sister, — something might not have happened to *them*, just to let you know that I was keeping you in mind.

"Once or twice you played your cards quite

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prettily; but oh! how you bungled them at others! Still, I might have expected that from your books. What could be worse of their sort than they? I 've read them all, though how I endured it I don't know. There is *one* thing *I could n't* endure, however, and that is that you should write about *me*. Spare me that last indignity and I 'll forgive you the brutal, blackguardly, costermonger blows you struck me behind the Post Office."

His eyes shone wickedly as he spoke, and then, for the first time, it occurred to me (I had been too fascinated by the man to think of it before) that he must have some motive for thus putting himself to the trouble of holding me in conversation at a time when he was, as I could see, suffering the keenest physical pain. What could his motive be?

For answer there came from the space where the dynamite was stored, a tiny splutter, not unlike the splutter which is given occasionally by a badly-trimmed lamp.

We had *not* been in time to prevent him carrying out his devilish purpose after all! And I — blind fool that I was — had been listening idly to his chatter, not knowing that every

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word which fell from his lips was bringing nearer the certainty of a dreadful fate.

This was why he had forced himself to smile and wear a mask, was it?

But the mask was off now, for catching sight of the horror in my face as I leapt to my feet, he raised himself on his arm, and glared at me with a countenance contorted out of all human likeness by devilish hate and exultation.

"You 're too late, you ——! You 're too late. We 're going to hell together, and if there 's a deeper hell still, I 'll seize you with a grip you can't shake off, and leap with you into the eternal fire. You sha'n't escape me there any more than you have here, for we 'll burn together! You 're too late! you 're too ——"

His voice died away in the distance, for I was by this time in the dinghy, and rowing as man never rowed before. Thank God, I was already ten yards away — twenty, fifty, a hundred!

Suddenly the sea behind me seemed to open up in one sheet of purple flame, and I was knocked backward out of the boat as if by a blow from a clenched fist. Then it seemed as if the sea had picked me up in its arms — as I

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had once seen a drink-maddened man pick up a child, whom he afterwards dashed head-foremost against a brick wall — and had flung me away and away over the very world's edge.

. . . . . .

When I came to myself I was lying high and dry upon the Kentish coast, carried there, no doubt, by the huge wave that had followed the explosion.

Captain Shannon had been arrested at last, and by an officer who, for your crimes and mine, reader, — be they few or many, trivial or great, — is now hunting each of us down to bring us to justice.

That detective — Detective Death — there is no eluding; and one day he will lay his hand upon your shoulder and upon mine and say, "Come."

And we shall have to go.

THE END

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CAPTAIN SHANNON

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